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Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araqchi says he will likely meet with US envoy Steve Witkoff in Geneva on Thursday, noting that there is still 'a good chance' of a diplomatic solution on Tehran's nuclear ambitions. P 14

In response to a lawsuit filed last month, **JPMorgan, the largest bank in US, acknowledged for the first time late Friday that it had cut off more than 50 Trump accounts in Feb 2021,** following the Jan 6 attack on the Capitol. P 14

Denmark and its territory Greenland have rejected Trump's offer to send a naval hospital ship to the Arctic island coveted by the US President. P 14

World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz storms to Qatar Open crown with a blistering 6-2, 6-1 straight-sets masterclass in just 50 mins to secure the trophy against Frenchman Arthur Fils in Doha. P 16

SA beat India to end 12-match T20 WC win streak

Corbin Bosch took a stunning catch despite colliding with Keshav Maharaj and claimed 2/32 as South Africa, runners-up in 2024, ended defending champs India's record streak of 12 wins in T20 World Cup matches. Batting first, the Proteas scored 187/7. India's chase never took off and they were bundled out for 111 to lose their first Super 8 match by 76 runs. P 15

Another top Maoist surrenders in T'gana

Malla Raji Reddy alias Sangram, a central committee and politburo member of CPI (Maoist), surrendered before Telangana police officials along with 50 cadres, sources said on Sunday. TNN

2 sisters die before wedding, probe on

Two sisters, both brides-to-be, died hours before their wedding in Rajasthan's Jodhpur on Saturday. Police stopped their cremation and have started an investigation. P 6

Bullets in IITian's bag, his friend held

Police arrested a 23-year-old college dropout from Bihar, from IIT Bombay's hostel premises on Feb 19 for keeping five live bullets in his childhood friend's bag at the institution. TNN

'Caste' attack leaves 2-month-old dead

A two-month-old baby died Saturday after her family from Chakali community was allegedly assaulted for refusing to pay Rs 100 to enter a temple during a village fair in Telangana. P 6

IT intern from Maha drowns in TN

A 23-year-old IT intern from Maharashtra drowned at Chennai's Golden Beach after being swept to sea while trying to click a selfie on Saturday evening. P 10

Know Nanma Karnataka?

SCAN THE Q!

Scan the QR & answer the quiz question. Correct answer will be revealed tomorrow!

Yesterday's answer: Gangabai Hangal

Tariff turbulence: Govt puts trade team's US visit on hold

SCOTUS Ruling An Opening To Seek Better Deal?

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Amid the uncertainty triggered by the US Supreme Court order invalidating Trump's tariffs, govt has decided to reschedule the visit of the Indian team to Washington DC for finalising the legal text of the interim framework of the trade deal.

Commerce department officials said the two sides were of the view that the visit by chief negotiator Darpan Jain and his team should be rescheduled until the latest developments and their implications have been evaluated. Jain was to hold three-day consultations, starting Monday, ahead of US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer's visit to India to sign the agreement.

The two sides have so far agreed on a broad framework which reflects understanding but no mutually binding commitment. There are indications in certain govt quarters that the Modi govt may not be averse to exploring if the SCOTUS's ruling has created enough room to seek better terms.

Katyal quoted DGFT's statement to court, "Nor does (122) have any obvious application here, where the concerns the President identified in declaring an emergency arise from trade deficits, which are conceptually distinct from balance-of-payments deficits." Agencies

▶ Govt reviews impact, P 13

Stick to terms of trade deal: EU to US

European Commission Sunday demanded that US stick to terms of last year's EU-US trade deal, after Trump slapped new levies. Following US SC ruling. Meanwhile, US trade representative Jamieson Greer said no country that reached trade deals with US has shared plans to withdraw P 14

Desi lawyer in tariff case disputes Trump's 15% levy

Washington: Prominent Indian-American litigator Neal Katyal has raised significant legal questions regarding US President Trump's decision to impose a 15% global tariff, pointing to a direct contradiction with previous arguments made by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

In a post on X, Katyal, who recently led a successful legal challenge against the administration's trade policies at US Supreme Court, suggested that Trump's reliance on Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 may be legally flawed. The administration's own legal team had previously distanced itself from that statute, he said.

Katyal quoted DOJ's statement to court, "Nor does (122) have any obvious application here, where the concerns the President identified in declaring an emergency arise from trade deficits, which are conceptually distinct from balance-of-payments deficits." Agencies

WHAT IS 301?

- Trump hints he'd use **sec 301 against trading partners.** This provision has in past been challenged by EU at WTO, with India among interested parties
- Exporters fense | With **frequent tariff changes,** exporters have to **recalibrate costs, negotiate or renegotiate** with suppliers: P Banerjee, MD of Pearl Global
- Uncertainty | Markets expected to stay **volatile this week**

▶ Convince Congress, P 14

Cops bust module linked to LeT, foil plot to strike Delhi

7 Bangladeshis With Aadhaar IDs Among 8 Arrested

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New Delhi: In a multi-state counter-terror operation, the Delhi Police special cell busted a terror module comprising radicalised individuals affiliated with the terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Eight suspects, seven of whom are Bangladeshi nationals with Indian Aadhaar cards, have been arrested.

A major terror attack was averted with the arrests. A temple in Chandni Chowk was one of the targets which its images being found in the suspects' devices. The car bomb blast reported last Nov had happened near this temple located near the Red Fort.

The operation kicked off after a series of provocative posters were pasted at metro stations. The poster incident in Delhi was revealed to be a calculated act of psychological warfare and a test of the module's mobility.

On Feb 8, CISF had filed a complaint with the police that unknown individuals had affixed pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters at the Janpath and other Metro stations, a major security breach before the AI summit.

ARRESTS IN KOL, TN

- **Pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters recently put up at Janpath and other Metro sites** eulogising ultra Burhan Wani
- **Police also seized 10 phones filled with radicalising content,** 25 credit-debit cards, 5 POS machines used for clandestine financial transactions, and original Bangladeshi passports
- Suspects were held from **Kolkata and TN's Tiruppur** in separate raids

▶ Radicalising content, P 8

Three terrorists in Kishtwar hideout killed

Jammu: Security forces killed three terrorists during a gunfight in Kishtwar district of J&K, tightening a weeks-long hunt through dense forests and steep terrain, officials said Sunday, reports **Sanjay Khajuria.**

Fighting erupted in the Chatroo forest belt, where joint teams moved on intelligence inputs pointing to terrorists hiding in a mud house. As search parties closed in, the terrorists fired, triggering hours of combat. Two terrorists were killed in initial action. A third body was found by evening from a blown-out hideout, officials said. Authorities have yet to establish their identities. Troops seized arms and ammunition, including three AK-47 rifles.

▶ Army units, P 8

Country knows you are naked, why strip: PM on Cong protest

Sandeep Rai & Kumar Rakesh | TNN

Meerut/New Delhi: "The country already knows you are naked, then what was the need for taking off your clothes," PM Narendra Modi said on Sunday lambasting Congress for using the global AI summit to display its "gandi and nangi (dirty and shameless)" politics before foreign guests. He also pinned the Youth Congress's shirtless protest on the party's "reckless and unbridled" leader, a pointed swipe at Rahul Gandhi.

In his first remarks on the Youth Congress's unprecedented protests on Friday, Modi told a public gathering after inaugurating development projects in Meerut that the opposition party broke all norms without considering it was a national event and not BJP's.

"The entire country was filled with pride (about the summit) but what did Congress and its ecosystem do? Congress turned a global event of India into an arena of its dirty and naked politics," he said, adding that the "party's leader" was bent on destroying the country in his quest to become PM.

PM Narendra Modi on Sunday flagged off the Meerut Metro and Namo Bharat train from Shatabdi Nagar station in Meerut, giving a fillip to high-speed intercity travel and swift intra-city movement. From there, the PM also undertook a Metro ride. "Rapid rail services will reduce travel time between Meerut, Delhi to around 40-45 minutes," said UP CM Yogi Adityanath

Congress responded on X, "Asking questions is our right. It is the responsibility of the youth... Modi is compromised... He cannot suppress our voices to protect himself".

▶ A burden for nation, P 7

Gravel truck collides with SUV, 5 cops killed in Odisha

Jharsuguda: Five policemen returning from a colleague's wedding reception in Jharsuguda were killed and three co-passengers critically injured early Sunday in a head-on highway collision between their vehicle and a gravel-laden truck, **reports Ritesh Sharma.**

At 58, drill sub-inspector Niranjan Kujur of Gidhapahadi in Sundargarh was the oldest of the deceased. Other victims were home guard Bhaktabandhu Mirdha (43), constables Kashiram Bhoi (35) and Debadatta Sa (45), and havildar Lingraj Duburi (56), all from Jharsuguda.

Two of the three other cops in the SUV have been shifted to Bargarh. The injured truck driver is being treated in Sambalpur.

▶ Accident prone, P 8

Two compensation claims can't be made for one accident: HC

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: If an accident victim has availed relief under Employees Compensation Act, then he/she cannot make claim for the same incident under Motor Vehicles Act, according to Karnataka high court.

R Nataraju, from Davanagere and working as a lorry cleaner, died after another lorry rammed his vehicle on May 16, 2006. His family members moved Motor Accident Claims Tribunal, Davangere, seeking Rs 12 lakh compensation. On Oct 10, 2013, Rs 4.94 lakh compensation with 6% interest was awarded. Royal Sundaram Alliance Insurance, the insurer of the offending vehicle, appealed against the verdict.

The appellant argued that, in respect of the accident, the family members had already sought relief from the commissioner under Employees Compensation Act, and an order was passed in their favour on Oct 15, 2008. The insurer submitted that the said award was also challenged before the high court. The HC absolved the insurer of the liability.

> "For any victim in an accident, he/she can file a claim petition either under Employees Compensation Act or under Motor Vehicles Act... Therefore, the filing of motor vehicle claim case itself is not maintainable and is liable to be set aside
> —High court

▶ Not maintainable, P 5

Marital discord alone doesn't prove abetment of suicide: HC

Dehradun: Deciding a 15-year-old criminal appeal against a 2011 sessions court judgment in Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand HC has acquitted a man convicted of abetting his wife's suicide, holding that "marital discord, suspicion and quarrels, while unfortunate, are common in married life," **reports Pankaj Sharma.**

"Liability under IPC section 306 (abetment of suicide) cannot be established merely because a marriage was strained or a husband suspected his wife's character," said the HC. The trial court had sentenced the man to seven years' rigorous imprisonment.

On Sept 15, 2004, the woman had died by suicide, hanging herself at her in-laws' home in Khatima.

▶ HC acquits man, P 8

Armed man killed after entering secure perimeter of Trump's Florida resort

Washington: An armed man was shot and killed early Sunday after he entered the secure perimeter of Mar-a-Lago, President Donald Trump's resort in Palm Beach, Florida, the US Secret Service said. He drove in as another vehicle was exiting, and was carrying a gas can and shotgun, it said.

Although Trump often spends weekends at his resort, he and first lady Melania were at the White House at the time of the attack. The intruder, from North Carolina and in his early 20s, had been reported missing by his family a few days ago, said spokesman Anthony Guglielmi. Cops believe he headed south and picked up the shotgun along the way.

Guglielmi said a box for the weapon was discovered in the man's vehicle after the incident, which took place around 1.30am. Sources said the intruder was identified as 23-year-old Austin Tucker Martin. AP

'RAISED SHOTGUN'

- Sunday's intruder **drove in via north gate of the resort** and was confronted by two Secret Service agents
- **Asked to drop what he was carrying,** he raised a shotgun to shooting position and was shot dead, authorities said
- Trump **faced 2 assassination bids during 2024 campaign,** at West Palm Beach club, and at a Pennsylvania rally where a gunman fired eight shots

▶ FBI takes over, P 14

BLACK LADY SMILES ON SRIIMURALI

AND THE AWARD...: Sriimurali (L) received Best Actor in a leading role (male) for Kannada film Bagheera at the 70th Filmfare Awards South with Kerala Tourism in Kochi on Saturday night. Aishatha Pandzapura was adjudged the Best Actor in a leading role (female) for Koli Esru. Shakhahari claimed the Best Film award | P 8

8.7L units in pipeline: Karnataka ranks fourth in housing projects

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Bengaluru: In an indicator of strong housing demand fuelled by employment growth, especially in Bengaluru, Karnataka continues to see large housing demand with nearly 8.7 lakh residential units covering 7,000-lakh-sqft carpet area in the pipeline. The state ranks fourth nationally in terms of residential units across 4,462 projects, according to projects registered with Real Estate Regulatory Authority (Rera).

Experts and industry observers said the high residential unit count and expanding carpet area show more buyers are entering the formal market and are opting for slightly larger homes after Covid-19. Future growth will hinge on improving ease-of-doing business, speeding up approvals, and ensuring better coordination among govt agencies, they added.

MAHA TOPS LIST

- **Nearly 8.7 lakh residential units covering 7,000-lakh-sqft carpet area** in pipeline in state
- After Bengaluru, **tier-2 cities such as** Mangaluru, Mysuru, Kalaburagi, and Belagavi are also **seeing growing acceptance of apartment living**
- **Maharashtra tops the list with over 4.71 residential units** in pipeline, followed by UP (1.11 units) and MP (8.91 units)

▶ Largest market, P 4

Rajaji statue to replace Lutyens' at Prez house he designed

Kumar Rakesh, Dipak Dash & Mallica Joshi

New Delhi: Architect of New Delhi Edwin Lutyens' legacy in independent India came to symbolise a rarefied milieu inhabited by those with an enviable mix of power, pedigree and influence. To critics, gyms came and went but Lutyens' elite was permanent.

Since coming to office in 2014, PM Modi has been unabashed in his disdain for what he calls as 'Lutyens' gang' or 'Lutyens' jamaat'. Roads and powerful addresses have been renamed and Nataji's statue placed on the pedestal meant for the British emperor. Importance has been accorded to Hindi and other Indian languages, and names rooted in India's heritage and legacy have replaced British-era monikers.

Now, Lutyens' own statue is set to be removed from his signature construction — Rashtrapati Bhawan.

In his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast, Modi announced that a statue of C Rajagopalachari will replace that of Lutyens in Rashtrapati Bhawan on Monday.

▶ Part of reform, P 8

ENDING 'SLAVE MENTALITY': PM

- **Edwin Lutyens** was main architect of several New Delhi structures, including **Rashtrapati Bhavan** and **India Gate.** Credited with inventing **'Delhi Order'** of classical architecture
- While his legacy remains matter of debate, part of **New Delhi is linked to his name** in recognition of his contribution
- **C Rajagopalachari, or Rajaji, the country's first and only Indian governor general,** opposed Nehru-era central planning and licencing curbs. In 1959, he founded **Swatantra Party** as a classical liberal alternative to Congress
- **On replacing Lutyens' statue,** PM Modi said it's a continuation of his push to rid the country of 'slave mentality'

Ambulance blocked over mishap, faces 15-min delay

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Bengaluru: In an incident that triggered public anger, an ambulance rushing to attend to a critically ill patient was allegedly stopped midway after it grazed a car near Alliance University at Anekal in Bengaluru Rural district on Saturday, resulting in a 15-minute delay.

Based on a complaint by driver Gnanendra, police registered a case and detained two persons, Vasanth from Anekal and Bharath from Hosur in Tamil Nadu.

The accident occurred when 108 Arogya Kavacha ambulance, which set out from Anekal with its siren blaring, navigated a narrow stretch of the road in front of the campus. According to reports, a car moving or parked along the roadside partially obstructed the carriageway. In the process, the ambulance reportedly touched the car.

'FILE COMPLAINT'

- An **ambulance, which was rushing to attend a patient,** touches a car near Alliance University at Anekal
- A **video shows the driver asking the car owner to take a photo and file a complaint,** but the person gets into an argument and blocks the way
- Under traffic laws, **motorists are legally bound to give free passage to emergency vehicles.** Failure to do so can attract penalties

▶ Rage of grazing car, P 5

Report: India Inc slowing women's climb to top deck

A survey by All India Management Association and KPMG-India shows that while 79% of women professionals across sectors and company sizes aspired to leadership roles in India Inc, around 30% of companies reported stagnation or decline in women leaders over the past five years; 30% had no women in leadership roles at all.

The report says only 1% of women currently occupy board-level positions, reports **Manash Gohain.**

"Women's ambition is strong and sustained," the report said, pointing out that structural bottlenecks were the main constraints.

▶ FULL REPORT: PAGE 6

Across Manipur's fault line, Kuki man visits Meitei in-law

Donald Saiem | TNN

Imphal: Three years of barricades, curfews and fear have split Manipur into two hardened worlds. On Saturday, an internally displaced man crossed the line anyway.

Anthony Naulak, from the Paite tribe of the Kuki-Zo community, walked into a home in Imphal valley and touched the feet of his Meitei mother-in-law, Ruhini Okram. A ritual older than the conflict raging in the state since 2023.

The journey itself was the message. More than 260 people have been killed and over 60,000 displaced since clashes erupted between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities in 2023. Since then, movement has been sharply curtailed — valley residents rarely enter Kuki-majority hills, and Kukis seldom travel into Imphal valley.

Anthony Naulak with his mother-in-law, Ruhini Okram

▶ I feel secure, P 10

6 TROUPES. 5 DECADES. Lodestars of K'taka theatre

*Across Karnataka, six iconic troupes — born from friendships, campus dreams, activism and maverick mentors — mark fifty years of shaping Kannada theatre. From the disciplined fire of Kala Gangotri and the folk-rooted innovations of Spandana to Rangasampada's socially conscious artistry, each forged its own path. Samudaya turned theatre into movement, Benaka became 'Karanth University,' and Nataranga proved that passion outweighs formal training. **Tina Shashikanth** traces their journeys across a half-century of resilience and rebellion*

Scene from Gokula Nirgamana

How BV Karanth rewrote the language of Kannada theatre

For five decades, the sound of a live audience, the energy of workshops, and the vision of one maverick director have defined the Bengaluru-based theatre troupe, Benaka (Bengaluru Nagara Kalavidaru). As the stage company celebrates its golden jubilee, renowned filmmaker and Benaka president TS Nagabharana sits down to reflect on a journey that began in 1969 and was forever shaped by the legendary BV Karanth.

Troupe | Benaka
Popular plays | Jokumaraswamy, Sattavara Neralu, Hayavadana and Gokula Nirgamana

The seeds of Benaka were sown before the troupe even got its name. In 1969, playwright Adya Rangacharya (Sriranga) conducted a drama training course for teachers. A group of about a dozen young men, fresh out of their pre-university programme, joined the workshop. By 1970, they formed a group called Sakashailoosharu (Actors of the Century), a name given by Sriranga himself.

BV Karanth

The real transformation came in 1972 when Karanth arrived in Bengaluru, determined to inject new life into the theatre scene. . The Kalakshetra was closed for repairs; the first Bayalu Natakotsava (open-air theatre festival) was planned. Backed by the Kannada department of Bangalore University, Karanth organised dialogues, plays and seminars. On Feb 11, 1972, the very first performance of "Jokumaraswamy" was staged. It was a landmark moment, and the group Sakashailoosharu officially became Benaka (registered in 1974).

For Nagabharana, Karanth was not just a director; he was an institution. "I grew up in Karanth University," he states. When Karanth arrived in 1972, the Indian cultural world was seeking new dimensions. While writers like Girish Karnad and Chandrashekhar Kambar were scripting a literary revolution, it was Karanth who truly established the role of the "director" in Kannada theatre.

"Before Karanth, we were into copying Western ideas," Nagabharana explains. "Shakespeare was always great, not Kalidasa. Karanth changed that idea of Indian theatre." He drew from indigenous sources — Yakshagana, Koodiyattam, and various texts — to build a visual language that did not lean on Western imports. Working in over 18 countries and directing in 11 Indian languages, Karanth, along with stalwarts like Habib Tanvir, redefined what Indian theatre could be.

Nagabharana recalls the whirlwind of energy that accompanied Karanth's visits to Bengaluru. "Whenever he came for ten days, four or five troupes would be waiting for him," he remembers. Karanth would rehearse with one group from 8am to 1pm, direct music for another from 2pm to 5pm, and continue into the evening.

It was during this time that Nagabharana, working backstage, found his own calling. "It was Karanth who stimulated the director in me," he says.

Karanth's lessons were profound. He taught that theatre is alive only when there is continuous action. If a play stops after a few shows, the stage action dies. This philosophy became Benaka's lifeblood. Today, they don't rest on one production; they keep about eight plays active. The numbers are staggering: 50 plays, 20 writers, 23 directors, and 2,313 shows. "Sattavara Neralu" has crossed 624 shows, while "Jokumaraswamy" will celebrate its 601st performance on Feb 26, 2026. "Hayavadana" stands at 510 shows.

This legacy is carried forward by a system Karanth instilled: the workshop model. Benaka never just does a play; they conduct a workshop, building the production with youngsters. This constant influx of new blood has resulted in five generations of actors, with nearly 1,000 artistes trained. "We have old roots, but new shoots constantly join us," says Nagabharana.

Karanth's vision extended beyond the stage. He championed the motto: "Education in theatre, theatre in education." He believed that while anyone can act, true theatre requires discipline and qualification.

A fearless ensemble

For fifty years, long before the glare of multiplexes and the instant gratification of OTT platforms, a group of Bengaluru-based theatre buffs would clock out of their day jobs and step into the twilight world of amateur theatre. They called themselves Rangasampada. And they are a legacy as well as a living history of Kannada theatre itself.

On Feb 21, the silver jubilee theatre festival opened with "Sharmishte", a one-person play starring actress and former minister Umashree. The character of Sharmishte is deeply personal to her, a role she first performed decades ago in a play with the same troupe. But Rangasampada and Umashree arrived at this moment traversing a long path winding through censorship, social movements, and an unyielding love for the stage.

Troupe | Rangasampada
Popular plays | Chomana Dudi, Odalala

Rangasampada's story began in 1972, founded by R Nagesh as a creative project. Their first production was Girish Karnad's "Yayati". Soon after, Prasanna, home from the National School of Drama during the holidays, was roped in to direct GB Joshi's "Kadadida Neeru". The energy was immediate and electric.

Ranga Sampada during Gokak Chaluvali in Bengaluru

The 1970s were a period of intense creativity. They adapted Chandrashekhar Kambar's "Jaisidda Nayaka" and took on the avant-garde staging a lavish production of Brecht's "Three Penny Opera" with a then-astronomical budget of Rs 42,000. But for Rangasampada, art was never divorced from reality.

In 1977, during the Emergency, they were performing a play in Bijapur when the troupe was arrested. "We were all arrested," recalls VM Nagesh, one of the lead members who has been with the group since its inception. The incident cemented their identity as a troupe unafraid to provoke thought.

That same spirit drove them to seek out the giants of Kannada literature. When they approached Jnanpith awardee Shivaram Karanth to adapt "Mookajjiya Kanasugalu," he famously refused, suggesting they do "Chomana Dudi" instead. They followed his advice, and in 1976, their production of Choma ran for 85 shows, predating the famous film adaptation. The following year, they collaborated with director TS Nagabharana for the dance drama "Sangya Balya".

It was the beginning of a golden era. They travelled to Calcutta and Mumbai, and in the early 80s, when the state and academy seemed to retreat from supporting new writing, Rangasampada stepped in. They instituted their own drama award scheme, inviting scripts from across Karnataka. From this competition emerged masterpieces like HS Venkateshamurthy's "Hejjegalu" and, most significantly, "Odalala".

The troupe's commitment to social causes was as strong as their artistic drive. They participated in the Gokak movement for Kannada primacy and protested for 22 days against the govt's plan to build an exhibition centre at the proposed Kannada Bhavana site. They even agitated to reduce rental fees for amateur troupes at Ravindra Kalakshetra, ensuring the ecosystem remained accessible for future generations.

The 80s and 90s saw a stream of powerful productions, including the political "Harakeya Kuri" by Chandrashekhar Kambar. As Rangasampada celebrates its golden jubilee, looking back is inevitable, but looking forward is essential. The troupe's history is written not just in the plays it produced, but in the protests and causes it joined, the awards it instituted, and the actors it nurtured.

The unscripted, untrained heart of Kannada stage

For the past five decades, Nataranga has stood as a vibrant testament to the power of passion over formal training in Kannada theatre. As the troupe celebrates its golden jubilee, the narrative provided by Srinivas G Kappanna and Girija Lokesh reveals a journey driven not by academic rigour but by friendship, spontaneity, and an undying love for the stage.

Troupe | Nataranga
Popular play | Kakanakote

Nataranga was born in 1972 from the camaraderie of three colleagues working in the govt's information department: CR Simha, Lokesh and Srinivas G Kappanna. They were part of a wave of 'non-trained' artistes who shaped Kannada theatre. Kappanna recalls that the spark for this movement was the landmark 1969 production of Girish Karnad's "Tughlaq". "There was no one who was formally trained in theatre," he explains. Just as Karnad had no formal playwriting training, Lokesh had no theatre background, and even Kappanna, who would go on to specialise in lighting design, was self-taught. It was this informal theatre that created the most jubilant group of the Kannada stage.

Girija Lokesh as stepmother & CR Simha in the titular role in Tughlaq, in 1973

The group's first play was Kailasam's "Poli Kitty", staged on a Sankranti day. Their identity was truly forged with their production of Masti Venkatesh Iyengar's "Kakanakote". It was a trendsetter, not just for its stellar cast featuring Lokesh and Girija, but for its music, composed by the legendary C Ashwath. Unlike later groups like Samudaya, which emerged with strong political awareness, Nataranga's initial motivation was simple. "If someone asked why we do drama, we would tell them it was fun, very blindly," admits Kappanna. Their reward was the long queues at Ravindra Kalakshetra and the euphoria of houseful shows. Girija and Lokesh married in 1975.

The group was a constellation of stars, including Simha, Lokesh and Srinath, all alumni of the National College Histrionics Club. Nataranga didn't stick to conventional plays either, staging abstract works like Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" to great acclaim. Later, TN Seetharam's "Nammolagobba Najookayya" created such a craze that people gatecrashed the theatre, forcing the group to abandon tickets and rely on audience contributions. The group made history by converting "Kakanakote" into a film with the same cast and crew—a feat never achieved before.

CM Ramakrishna Hegde, Dr Rajkumar and HD Deve Gowda attend 150th show of Mukhyamantri at Chowdiah Memorial Hall in Bengaluru in 1986

Playing same lead role for 46yrs across 900 shows

There is a saying in the world of theatre that a play dies every night. Once the curtains close and the audience shuffles out into the dark, that moment in time — with its unique energy, its actors' particular inflections, and the collective breath of the crowd — is gone forever. "It is an examination," says BV Rajaram, director of the iconic Bengaluru-based theatre group Kala Gangotri. "We have to present with responsibility."

What started as a dream by a group of college boys in 1971 has become one of the most enduring legacies in Indian amateur theatre. BV Rajaram and his friends were still students at Acharya Pathashala but knew that they needed an outlet for their creative energy. They started a troupe 'Kala Gangotri' but their turning point came only in 1975 when Dr H Narasimhaiah, then vice-chancellor of Bangalore University, started a diploma course in dance, drama and music.

For the young men of Kala Gangotri, who had household responsibilities and day jobs, this was a godsend. With their training complete, Rajaram and his friends decided to revive Kala Gangotri with a mission: to do something different. They turned to Rabindranath Tagore's "Achalayatana", a play championing freedom and universal education. It was a massive production featuring over 30 actors. The gamble paid off.

Troupe | Kala Gangotri
Popular plays | Mukhyamantri, Achalayatana

Soon, Kala Gangotri's repertoire became a veritable who's who of Indian literature. They staged works by Kuvempu, Kailasam, and Samsa. They performed Karnad, Kambara, and Sanskrit plays. They adapted Greek comedies. If "Achalayatana" brought them recognition, another play brought them immortality.

In 1980, the group got their hands on a Hindi script by Ranjit Kapoor titled "Mukhyamantri". It had been staged at NSD but nowhere else. They got Professor Lohitashwa to translate it into Kannada. This was a political satire unlike anything Kannada theatre had seen before.

The staging was as unconventional as the script. They converted the muddy cycle stand behind Ravindra Kalakshetra into a theatre. It ran houseful for seven nights. "Mukhyamantri" became their trump card. The play follows the rise and antics of a corrupt politician, and the man playing the lead, H Chandrashekhar, became so synonymous with the role that the public started calling him "Mukhyamantri Chandru." As the group staged its 900th performance for the jubilee event, H Chandrashekhar — now in his 70s — once again donned the mantle. In the world of amateur theatre, for a single actor to play the same lead role for 46 years across 900 shows is an unprecedented record.

Kala Gangotri's journey has been intertwined with the political and cultural history of Karnataka. Every chief minister since Devraj Urs has watched "Mukhyamantri".

When act meets activism

It was the mid-1970s. The amateur theatre scene in Karnataka was buzzing with energy, riding the wave of a transformative drama festival organised by the likes of Girish Karnad, BV Karanth, and Chandrashekhar Kambar. Amid this fertile ground, a new entity was born, not just as a troupe, but as a movement. This August, Samudaya, the cultural collective that redefined Kannada theatre, completes 50 years. It will be one of six veteran groups celebrated at the Honnaru Rangotsava, being organised by Umashree, from Feb 21.

Troupe | Samudaya

As Gundanna C Krishnaswamy, a core member since the early days and vice-president, recalls Samudaya was the brainchild of a young Prasanna. Fresh from his training at the National School of Drama, Prasanna envisioned a theatre with a purpose. "He believed theatre should not just be for entertainment or art's sake," Gundanna says. "It must carry a social message." Gathering intellectuals like Dr K Marulasiddappa, Ki Ram Nagaraj, and Nisar Ahmed, Prasanna launched Samudaya in Aug 1975.

Their first production was "Huttava Badidare", an adaptation of a play by KV Narayana. It was a story of palace conspiracies with a sharp message. "It said, if you want to change society, make hard-hitting moves. Don't beat around the bush."

Samudaya grew into a statewide movement. At its peak, it boasted of 35 independent units, from Raichur to KGF. Directors like MS Sathyu, BV Karanth and Badal Sarkar were drawn to its energy. The soul of Samudaya has always been its connection to the people and their struggles. They pioneered the concept of the 'cultural jatha' (procession). In one monumental effort, two teams on cycles and matadors crisscrossed the entire state for a month, converging in Dharwad.

Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, a street play by Raghunandan

They organised jathas for farmers' rights during the Gundu Rao regime, and even mounted a massive campaign against nuclear proliferation.

Now, at 50, the movement is turning its gaze inwards. With the slogan "Manushyatvadatta Samudaya 50" (Samudaya's 50-year march towards humanity), the group is currently organising a year-long festival that started on Aug 2025.

Transforming folk memory into total theatre

It began, as many journeys do, with a simple declaration. Four friends — Rani Rao, Anandaraju, Harsha Anandaraju, and BR Shashidhar — came together in Mangaluru, naming their fledgling group Rangashree in Dec 1971. They moved to Bangalore in 1973, and staged Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman". But the pull of the homeland was strong. Rani Rao's mother soon christened the group with a word that means "vibration" or "pulse": Spandana.

Spandana opened on Jan 15, 1974. Their inaugural Kannada production was HV Venkatasubbaiah's political play "Lolakotte", staged at a time when Indira Gandhi's Emergency was in force across the nation. "All these artistes were walking around with their lives in their hands," recalls B Jayashree, the veteran theatre personality who would soon become the group's driving force. The artistes survived the political turmoil, but the experience left an indelible mark.

Spandana decided to stay clear of plays overtly political, turning its gaze instead to the rich soil of folk tradition and powerful human narratives. The turning point arrived when Jayashree directed a translation of Vijay Tendulkar's "Ghashiram Kotwal". The production was a success. Dramatists from Bombay made the trip to Bangalore just to witness it. "This is stronger than what we do, keep it up," they told her.

Sitting in that audience was a young Shankar Nag. Captivated, he approached Jayashree with a proposition. "He said, 'Jayashree, I will take up a play for you, you must act'." Jayashree had one condition: Shankar must direct it. This creative stalemate led to a unique collaboration.

A scene from Lakshapati Rajana Kathe

Jayashree found the script for "Sandhya Chhaya"; Shankar had "Barrister." A deal was struck. Shankar would direct "Barrister" for Spandana, featuring a stellar cast including his brother Anant Nag, Arundhati and Jayashree herself. It became Shankar Nag's first directorial venture in Bangalore and a landmark event for the group. Jayashree's portrayal of a tonsured woman in the play left audiences breathless. Yet, the play's intense psychological demands took a toll on Anant Nag, who found his role mentally straining. "We had to stop the play there."

Troupe | Spandana
Popular plays | Karimayi, Lakshapati Rajana Kathe

"From that day on, we thought instead of translations, we should do Kannada scripts." Jayashree turned to the novels of Chandrashekhar Kambar. In a breathtaking burst of creative energy, she adapted "Karimayi" in just eight days.

The group continued to evolve, staging children's plays and delving deeper into folk synthesis. Their dedication caught the attention of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. Invited to perform a new play in Delhi in 1985, Jayashree crafted a tapestry of theyyam, keelukudure, company curtain, mime, and even a Rajasthani instrument for "Lakshapati Rajana Kathe". The then Akademi chairman, Girish Karnad, watched and delivered his verdict: "This is total theatre, Jayashree... You have taken our Karnataka somewhere else."

The performance at Delhi's Kamani Auditorium became a defining memory. They performed on stages in cities like Cairo and Tashkent, where they received profound appreciation for their folk-rooted storytelling.

Looking back at the icons who shaped Karnataka's theatre — Girish Karnad, BV Karanth, Sriranga — she laments the diminishing ecosystem. Yet, the pulse of Spandana continues to beat, a testament to fifty years of transforming folk memory into total theatre, and of the enduring power of a stage well held.

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SURPUR PAINTINGS: A 400-year-old North Karnataka legacy

Surpur style of painting is an artistic tradition unique to Kalyana Karnataka region, comprising seven districts in the northeastern part of Karnataka. It has a history of about 400 years, says artist and history enthusiast Rehaman Patel. "It emerged during the rule of Bedar Nayaks, who ruled the Surpur kingdom between 1636 to 1858. Surpur kings, right from the founder Raja

HERITAGE MOTIFS

Gaddi Pidda Nayak and his successors like Hasarangi Pamanayaka, Immadi, Venkatappa Nayak and Mummadi Dewendra Venkatappa Nayak encouraged the art form in their courts," he says.

The tradition, he says, peaked during the regime of Raja Nalvadi Venkatappa Nayak who ruled the kingdom between 1843 and 1858. "The art form lost its patronage after 1858," he adds.

The roots of original Surpur (or Shorapur) painting are a fascinating blend

of survival, royal patronage and a unique "hybrid" aesthetic. Shorapur or Surapura is a historically significant town in Yadgir district, known for its role in resisting British rule. Surpur paintings didn't emerge in a vacuum but likely was the result of artists fleeing a collapsing empire to find a new home in North Karnataka.

"These paintings are believed to have gained popularity in the region when a group of painters migrated there following the disintegration of the Vijayanagara Empire after the Battle of Talikota in 1565," says the online encyclopaedia managed by Bengaluru-based Museum of Art & Photography (MAP).

The painting style bears strong similarities to Mysore and Tanjore styles, including the use of gesso, bright colours and embellishments such as gold leaf and semi-precious stones, according to the MAP website.

The convergence of styles may go back to the turbulent years after the Battle of Talikota. When the Vijayanagara Empire collapsed, its master artists scattered, seeking new courts to support their craft. It is likely that Mysore welcomed some, Tanjore took in others, and a significant contingent eventually reached Surpur.

Surpur paintings were initially done as murals or miniatures on white paper, wood and other surfaces. "Natural pigments, stone, leaf and soil were used to make miniatures. These were brought from Rajasthan. Now it's also done on canvas, normally in the size 6x8, using acrylic paint," says Rehaman.

Though Nayaks preferred their portraits and those of deities, scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata too got priority in the works of their times, he adds.

Bannaiah Garudadri, considered as the master artist of Surpur paintings, was the principal artist at the court of Raja Venkatappa Nayaka. His works are on display at various museums. "Scholar Jaya Appaswamy has recognised his legacy in her works. The Surpur style shaped by Garudadri blends Deccani, Mughal and South Indian aesthetics, standing apart from Mysore and Thanjavur traditions through its spiritual depth and distinctive visual language," points out Rehaman.

The second Bannaiah Garudadri was posthumously honoured with the National Award for Master Craftsmen in 1987 by the President of India.

Artist Vinod Raghuveer says that Surpur art was studied by veteran artists like Vijay Hagargundagi for decades. "Despite its limitation of being practised by just a few artists, Surpur paintings can be seen hanging in Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, Jaganmohan Palace in Mysuru

and National Craft Museum in Delhi."

The office of development commissioner (handicrafts) brought out a coffee-table book on Surpur paintings in 2025.

Perfume fuels warehouse fire near N'mangala, 5 workers hurt

Times News Network

Bengaluru: An accidental fire ripped through a perfume warehouse at Makali, near Nelamangala, Sunday afternoon, injuring five labourers and causing losses estimated to run into crores.

The blaze broke out between 11am and 11.30am in a compressor unit kept inside one of the storage units of the warehouse where a private firm had stocked perfume bottles, fire and emergency officials said after a preliminary inquiry.

The flames quickly spread to adjacent stalls storing air-conditioning equipment and other materials. The warehouse complex, owned by one Lokesh and rented out to different firms, has 7-8 storage units built in a row. The fire was confined to three of them.

Five workers — Santosh, 26, from Kurubaramanahalli in Tumakuru district, Vishwanath, 35, Ramesh, 70, Manjunath, 45, and Jayaram — sustained injuries. They managed to rush out of the warehouse before emergency teams arrived. Bystanders took them to Victoria Hospital and a private hospital. Their condition was yet to be ascertained at the time of reporting.

According to a senior fire officer, deodorants in cans fuelled the rapid spread of the fire. An adjacent air-conditioned stall had stored small gas cylinders, leading to repeated explosions that hampered firefighting efforts.

As many as 11 vehicles — three water tankers, five bowsers, two foam tenders and an SDRF canter — were deployed along with nearly 50 personnel. Firefighters kept a distance initially due to the intensity of the blaze and intermittent blasts inside the 40x30 sqft storage units.

The fire was brought under control by only by 4.30pm, though dampening of the operations continued beyond 7pm. Officials said foam was not used as the burning materials did not warrant it. Instead, nine water tankers and bowsers were repeatedly refilled using water available on the premises of a neighbouring store. Itnesses told the media that the AC items gutted in the fire belonged to a company that manufactures air conditioners and air purifiers, while the chemicals belong to a tech MNC that also sells FMCG products. They alleged that the accident occurred due to the negligence of the manager.

The power supply to the warehouse disconnected and the fire extinguishers could not be used. People working inside rushed out, and the fire spread afterwards.

The warehouse is said to be spread across 60,000 sqft. The owner had taken all the fire safety measures, but the incident happened due to the negligence of the people working in the warehouse, the witnesses said, adding that the small AC cylinders burst one after the other.

"We [villagers] joined the dousing operation and helped avoid further damage," said one local resident.

"We saw the fire in the warehouse. The AC units, perfumes, and other items were gutted. Around 45 people were working at the time of the incident. They came running out, and the warehouse partition had caught fire," another resident said.

The exact extent of damage is yet to be assessed.

UP IN FLAMES: The blaze which broke out in a compressor unit quickly spread to adjacent stalls before firefighters could act

Retd officer spots blaze

Fire services were alerted by Ramakrishna, a retired officer of the department, who noticed the blaze while travelling by a bus towards his home at Thyamagondlu.

"I called the fire and emergency services from the bus and asked them to send tenders quickly," he said.

Muck stops here: City's 5 of 12 waste plants out of action

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Bengaluru: More than a decade after biomethanation plants were introduced in Bengaluru to convert domestic waste into biogas, the ambitious decentralised waste-to-energy model is faltering, with nearly half the units now lying defunct and generating little revenue.

Of the 12 plants established across the city, five are currently non-functional and in urgent need of repairs. These are located in KR Market, Begur, Mangammanapalya, Kuvempunagar and Varthur wards. While the first four have been earmarked for restoration, the Varthur unit is effectively out of the system after the contractor reportedly removed the machinery over unpaid operation and maintenance dues.

Ironically, the upkeep of each plant continues to cost the exchequer about Rs 85,000 per month, even though none, except one operated by NGOs, has been able to monetise the biogas produced. Officials of Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited (BSWML) admit that the plants are too small in scale to be commercially viable.

Each biomethanation facility was built at a cost of Rs 80 lakh, with an additional Rs 50 lakh for three years of operations, bringing the cost to Rs 1.3 crore per plant. Now, however, the cost of setting up a new plant has risen sharply to about Rs 2.5 crore. Two such new plants in Koramangala and Kammanahalli have already been constructed but are yet to be commissioned, while locations are being identified for two more.

Currently operational plants are located at Aramane Nagar, Gandhinagar, Yediyur, Pattabhiram Nagar, Koramangala and Domlur. Each facility is designed to process up to 50 tonnes of wet waste daily, but officials say the energy output remains modest at just 4-5% of the processed waste.

BSWML assistant general manager Santosh Kaddi explained that nearly half of the biogas generated is consumed internally to run the plant itself. "Currently, about 40-50% of biogas generated by a plant is used up in running the plant. This is identified as the captive usage. The rest is used to power streetlights," he said.

A bigger challenge lies in the absence of infrastructure to store or transport the gas for wider utilisation. "In some cases, when the generator is faulty, the gas needs to be flared as surplus gas cannot be stored," Kaddi added.

Koramangala unit earning revenue

The biomethanation plant at Koramangala stands as an exception. The plant was set up under an initiative by the local residents' welfare association under CSR funds. Saahas NGO undertook the management of the plant, which supplies biogas as fuel to nearby restaurants. The plant collects wet waste from around 10,000 households every day. Som Narayan of Carbon Masters, the agency that operates the plant, said the facility produces five tonnes of biogas per day. "The plant generates a monthly revenue of Rs 2.4 lakh by selling biogas to restaurants. This covers the operating costs, including the electricity bill of Rs 1 lakh and the labour cost of Rs 1.2 lakh," he said.

WHITE ELEPHANT? The upkeep of a plant, like the one at Gandhinagar costs about Rs 85,000 per month

New facility by GAIL

A mega biomethanation plant, with a capacity of 300 tonnes per day, is planned in association with Gail (India) Limited. The plant is planned on the Karnataka Compost Development Corporation premises near Hosur Road. "The plant is expected to produce around 10-12 tonnes of compressed bio-gas per day, which will be circulated through the domestic piped natural gas network in the city," Gail chief general manager Sanjay Kumar Singh told TOI, adding that the process of enrolling a contractor is currently underway.

Milk quality row: Suppliers attack co-op secy

Times News Network

Bengaluru: A routine quality check at the Goravigere village dairy turned violent after a group of milk suppliers allegedly assaulted and threatened the Milk Producers Cooperative Society secretary for questioning the quality of milk brought for collection on Feb 20.

The injured secretary, Thulasamma accused Siddesh, Vijay Kumar, Naveen Kumar, Mahesh and Babu of assaulting her in a complaint to Avalahally police.

During the inspection between 8am and 8.20am, she reportedly found the quality to be substandard. Thulasamma told **TOI** that standard milk quality should have 3.5% fat, but the milk brought by the accused ranged between 1.9% and 2.8% fat, and its water content was between 30% and 40%. Because of its quality, she refused to accept their milk.

Angered, the accused allegedly began verbally abusing her. She alleged they made inappropriate remarks about her attire, as she was wearing a sweater over a nightie, and accused them of assaulting her by pulling her by the hands, causing injuries.

She also claimed the group threatened her with dire consequences, warning that they would not "leave her".

Thulasamma and other members gathered at the spot and called police helpline 112. Before police reached the spot, the accused allegedly escaped.

A case was registered under the BNS sections 74 (assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 351 (criminal intimidation) and 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), and an investigation is under way. A senior police officer said the dispute between the complainant and the accused had started during the recent elections.

Rage over grazing car: Ambulance driver abused

▸ Continued from page 1

Instead of allowing the emergency vehicle to proceed, the car driver, allegedly joined by a few students, stopped the ambulance and engaged in a heated argument.

Despite the ambulance driver repeatedly explaining he was responding to a medical emergency, the vehicle was reportedly blocked for 10-15 minutes. The ambulance driver was verbally abused.

Police rushed in and controlled the situation. A video shows the driver asking the car owner or driver to take a photo of the ambulance and file a complaint, but the person got into an argument and blocked the way.

Under traffic laws, motorists are legally bound to give free passage to emergency vehicles, including ambulances and fire engines. Failure to do so can attract penalties and legal action.

The ambulance was blocked despite its driver explaining he was responding to a medical emergency

CALL HELPLINE 112

- If a citizen witnesses or is involved in incident where movement of an ambulance is obstructed, he or she must call emergency helpline 112 immediately
- Report the incident, provide exact location, note vehicle details; take photos or videos
- Approach police station and submit a complaint detailing the incident

Ordered iPhone, got a dud: Man takes legal route to win full refund

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Bengaluru: A Jalahalli resident ordered an iPhone but his excitement quickly turned to disbelief when a "used" and "fake" device was delivered. He took the legal route, and the First Additional District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission recently ordered a full refund.

The saga began when 39-year-old Ashoka Bhat decided on April 9, 2023, to buy a black iPhone 14 Pro Max for Rs 1.3 lakh and placed the order on Amazon. On April 11, he received the package, which he said contained a used product that didn't look original. He requested a refund.

While Amazon initially asked him to wait for three days, it later apologised and sought a return of the product. However, Amazon and Appario Retail, which sold the product, claimed Bhat returned the "wrong" item. A legal notice sent to the two entities went largely unheeded, with Amazon saying the actual product was not returned. Bhat filed a consumer complaint on July 10 seeking a refund.

A PHONEY TALE

- A 39-year-old resident orders a black iPhone 14 Pro Max for Rs 1.3 lakh on Amazon
- He receives the package on April 11, which he says contained a used product that didn't look original
- He requests a refund
- Amazon asks to return the product. However, it and Appario Retail, which sold the product, claim the buyer returned the purchased item
- The consumer files a complaint on July 10 seeking a refund
- The commission states the companies did not produce any evidence that the product delivered matched the order placed. The consumer's multiple correspondences and eventual legal notice, coupled with Appario's failure to file affidavits, demonstrates that he did not receive the genuine product
- It orders refund of full amount and Rs 2,000 in litigation costs

CONSUMER IS KING

In its defence, Appario Retail, based in Haryana, said the order was delivered by Amazon through an authorised agent. It added the grievance concerned with delivery issues, over which it had no role. Amazon, located at World Trade Centre, Rajajinagar, said the order was placed with Appario, an independent seller, and the tax invoice was issued by Appario, showing the sale was strictly between them. Payments went directly to Appario through an independent nodal account, separate from Amazon's accounts. Amazon added it initiated a return and refund process, but an enquiry revealed that Bhat returned the wrong product. The commission stated that the companies did not produce any evidence that the product delivered matched the order placed. Bhat's multiple correspondences and eventual legal notices, coupled with Appario's failure to file affidavits, demonstrated that the complainant did not receive the genuine product. "Amazon did not examine the delivery boy to disprove the case of the complainant, or produce any cogent evidence that the product delivered is the same as the order placed by the complainant."

The commission, comprising president Syed Anser Kaleem and member Sharavathi SM, on Jan 22, ordered Amazon and Appario to refund the full amount and Rs 2,000 in litigation costs.

Toddler killed as car overturns

A two-and-a-half-year-old boy, Ayansh, was killed and his parents injured after their car overturned following alleged rash and negligent driving on the Kundapur–Shivamogga state highway Saturday.

Police said the accused, Raghavendra Achar, was driving towards Siddapur with his wife Tulasi and their son Ayansh. He allegedly drove at high speed, suddenly veered to the extreme right and lost control, after which the car crashed into a roadside drain and overturned. TNN

1 highway, 3 states: B'luru-Chennai e-way to be fully ready by early 2027

Land Acquisition, Forest Clearance Caused Delays

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Bengaluru: The much-anticipated Bengaluru–Chennai Expressway — its 263km spanning three states — is still under construction, with the full corridor likely to open in early 2027. The project, once targeted for completion by 2024 and later by June 2026, has faced pending forest clearances, land acquisition hurdles and financial constraints faced by contractors.

At present, Karnataka segment of the highway is a 72km stretch between Hoskote and KGF. This has been fully operational for nearly a year. Other two segments — 85km in Andhra Pradesh and 106km in Tamil Nadu — have a completion rate of 92% and 80%, respectively. This means the promise of seamless high-speed travel remains unrealised for at least one more year.

Once complete, the expressway, which has been designed for speeds up to 120kmph, is expected to slash travel time between Bengaluru and Chennai from around six hours to just over two. Now, the widely used road from Bengaluru to Chennai runs through Hosur, Krishnagiri, Vellore and Kancheepuram. It takes 6-7 hours to cover the 340km distance.

TOLL FEE LOWERED

Effective Feb 15, NHAI revised the toll on the 71km Hoskote-KGF stretch to bring it on par with rates applicable to NH sections. Earlier, the toll was 25% higher than that of standard national highways. The new-fare arrangement will continue for one year or until completion of the expressway project. The Karnataka NH stretch sees 8,000 vehicles and toll collection of Rs 14 lakh a day. The link road from Sundarapalya to the Bengaluru-Kolar highway is in progress.

File photo

ZOOM PAST TRAFFIC: The expressway, designed for speeds up to 120kmph, is expected to slash travel time between Bengaluru and Chennai from six hours to over two hours

B'LURU – CHENNAI EXPRESSWAY
What's status now?

- Total length: 263.5 km
- Project cost: ₹17,692 cr
- Total completed: 234.8 km
- Pending Stretch: 28.6 km
- Design speed: 120 kmph

STATE-WISE PROGRESS

KARNATAKA 71.7 km
- Hoskote – Bethamangala
- 71.7 km completed and operational
- Status: 100% complete

ANDHRA PRADESH 85 km
- Bethamangala – Byreddypalli (25 km) – **Completed**
- Byreddypalli – Bangarupalem (31 km) – **24.5 km completed**
- Bangarupalem – Gudipala (29 km) – **Completed**
- Total Completed in AP: **78.5 km out of 85 km**
- Completion: **92%**

TAMIL NADU 106 km
- Gudipala – Walajahpet (24 km) – **24.3 km completed**
- Walajahpet – Arakkonam (24.5 km) – **24.3 km completed**
- Arakkonam – Kancheepuram (25.5 km) – **11 km completed**
- Kancheepuram – Sriperumbudur (31.7 km) – **25.4 km completed**
- Trumpet interchange, Sriperumbudur (1.1 km) – **Not completed**
- Total Completed in TN: **84.7 km out of 106 km**
- Completion: **80%**

Source: Lok Sabha

Given the significant cut in travel time by road, expectations had soared when Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari inspected the project site in Hoskote, near Bengaluru, in Jan 2021 and announced a 2024 completion target. Despite the assurance, only a partial stretch has been opened so far, leaving motorists waiting for the faster, smoother inter-city commute that was promised.

Progress has hit a major roadblock on the 25.5km Arakkonam–Kancheepuram stretch in Tamil Nadu, where work has come to a standstill. Informing Lok Sabha, Gadkari said financial constraints faced by the concessionaire led to work being halted in May 2025. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued a notice to terminate the contract. As per a court directive, senior lenders have proposed to substitute the concessionaire through a letter dated Jan 30, 2026.

"Being a greenfield corridor project, the expressway can be commissioned after completion of all packages, including the Arakkonam–Kancheepuram stretch," the minister stated. He added the slow progress was primarily due to the concessionaire's financial difficulties. As of now, no other major issue was affecting the project. "(After the substitution of the concessionaire by senior lenders), the balance work would be completed," he said, noting delays in forest clearance, land acquisition challenges, hard-rock formations and unseasonal rainfall had impacted progress.

NHAI sources indicated that while most remaining stretches may be completed by June 2026, the commissioning of the entire corridor could slip to early 2027. "By March 2027, the full stretch of the expressway is likely to be commissioned," a source said.

Credai: B'luru remains largest apartment market in K'taka

▸Continued from page 1

Ramachandra CH, joint secretary, Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (Credai) national chapter, told TOI: "Demand remains strong because money flow from industrial and infrastructure growth eventually moves into housing. However, project timelines of 4-6 can still be affected by factors such as worker shortages, market conditions and delays in utilities and approvals."

He added growth is driven by connectivity — like ORR in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Mumbai — and rising demand from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Bhaskar T Nagendrappa, president, Credai-Karnataka chapter, said the strong position is driven by Bengaluru's tech ecosystem, favourable weather and strong connectivity. "While Bengaluru remains the largest apartment market, tier-2 cities such as Mangaluru, Mysuru, Kalaburagi, and Belagavi are also seeing growing acceptance of apartment living, even as plotted developments dominate elsewhere. Post Covid, buyers are clearly opting for slightly larger homes," he said.

Builder associations said across India, residential real estate growth is driven largely by urbanisation, employment generation, and rising purchasing capacity.

"Maharashtra — beyond Mumbai, Thane and Pune — shows strong demand, and Karnataka is seeing a similar trend in Mysuru and Mangaluru. The state must boost employment in these cities, as apartment living is now common in smaller urban centres," Ramachandra said.

Just one project in 8-state N-E region

While larger states continue to dominate the residential supply pipeline, states in Northeast — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura — together account for just one registered residential project in Mizoram, translating into 322 units and barely 2 lakh sqft of carpet area.

In contrast, the Union Territories — Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, and the Union Territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu — show relatively stronger traction.

Together, they account for 330 residential projects, 13,202 units, and over 6,097 lakh sqft of carpet area, with the majority in Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, while others such as Ladakh and Lakshadweep continue to report negligible residential project registrations. As of Feb 16, there are a total of more than 1 lakh residential projects with 1.1 crore units, with a carpet area of more than 2 lakh sqft.

State/UT	Projects	Units	Carpet area (lakh sqft)
Maharashtra	50,544	47,18,556	1,13,816.7
MP	5,596	8,92,520	12,229.4
UP	3,464	11,74,443	16,602
Karnataka	4,452	8,67,471	7,136
Gujarat	7,515	6,55,748	6,271
All India	1,00,746	1,18,05,259	2,01,012.4

Source: Rera

North tightens waste segregation rules; Central clears 60 loads

Times News Network

Bengaluru: Bengaluru North and Central city corporations Sunday rolled out parallel measures to strengthen waste management and urban cleanliness, combining strict enforcement with large-scale field action across zones.

Bengaluru North city corporation commissioner Pommala Sunil Kumar issued firm directions making segregation of waste at source mandatory to reduce dependence on landfill sites and prevent recurring protests near dumping yards.

Wet waste collected from households will be sent for composting, while dry waste will be channelled to recycling units and waste-to-energy plants.

Setting a target, the commissioner directed assistant general managers and deputy general managers to ensure 65–70% segregated waste collection by March 2026 and tasked health inspectors, link workers, marshals and pourakarmikas with achieving this goal. Officials were also warned to actively cooperate in Swachh Survekshan 2025–26, with the first phase of a special cleanliness drive scheduled from March 1 to 8. Strict vigil and penalties were also mandated against public urination and spitting near skywalks and other public places.

ENCROACHMENT CLEARANCE

Meanwhile, the central city corporation conducted a massive cleanliness and black spot clearance drive from 6am across six assembly constituencies under its limits. Commissioner Rajendra Cholan said 8.8km of stretches were covered, with six JCBs and 40 tractors deployed to remove around 60 loads of roadside waste.

As many as 21 black spots were cleared during the operation, which saw participation from 192 pourakarmikas and sanitation staff.

Cleaning and encroachment clearance drives were done in Chamarajpet, Chickpet, Gandhinagar, Shantinagar, Shivajinagar and CV Raman Nagar constituencies, covering key stretches including VS Garden, T Mariyappa Road, RT Street Market, Sai Baba Road on Cambridge Road, Nandi Durga Road and Surunjandas Road.

Safari commences at Bandipur, Nagarahole

File photo

Online tickets were not available for many tourists on the first day

Times News Network

After a gap of nearly four months, the jungle safari started at both the Bandipur and Nagarahole tiger reserves on Sunday.

At Bandipur, the first safari was held at 2.30 pm. Authorities informed that tourist enquiries increased following the state govt's decision on Wednesday to relaunch the safari, which was suspended on Nov 7, 2025, to focus on man-animal conflict in Mysuru, Chamarajanagar and Kodagu districts. According to sources in the forest department, the safari started with all precautions. Police forces were deployed near the safari points to ensure that there would not be any untoward incidents.

"Online tickets were not available for many tourists on the first day. The response was moderate, as there was uncertainty over the start of the safari. Tourist numbers are expected to increase in the coming days," said an officer from Nagarahole.

Bribery case: BJP MLA, two aides in judicial custody

Bengaluru: BJP's Shirahatti MLA Chandru Lamani and his two personal assistants were Sunday remanded in judicial custody until March 3.

A team headed by Dharwad SP ST Siddhalingappa trapped the trio red-handed while allegedly accepting a bribe Saturday. Lamani, accused of demanding Rs 11 lakh from a contractor for a project, was allegedly caught receiving Rs 5 lakh from him at Laxmeshwara in Gadag district. The MLA and his aides — Manjunath Valmiki and Guru Nayak — were produced before special court judge Santosh Gajanan Bhat at his residence near Yelahanka Sunday. As the judge remanded them to judicial custody for 10 days, they were lodged in the central prison at Parappana Agrahara.

Lokayukta sleuths did not seek their custody. TNN

YOUNG GUNS WHO WON LOCAL CIVIC BATTLES

Anush.S @timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: As citizen activism drives considerable changes to the civic infrastructure, some even arise within the four walls of the classroom.

At Saturday's SolveCon 26 event organised by city-based non-profit Reap Benefit, 1,700 changemakers from across the country were at the forefront, recognised for their responsible interventions in society. The young minds, the majority of them from Karnataka, worked on civic action, education, climate and mental well-being within their localities.

When streetlights didn't work...

Drawing inspiration from her elder sister, a 14-year-old class 8 student, **Shahnaaz N** initially worked along with her schoolmates to solve local issues. Due to the inactivity of her teammates, she then started working alone and managed to solve four problems related to waste and streetlights so far.

Her first intervention came a year ago when garbage was being thrown near the gates of houses. "Dogs were scattering it everywhere, causing a bad smell and unhygienic surroundings," she noted. Speaking to local residents, she found out that people dumped rubbish on the roads as their working hours did not match the civic agency vehicle schedule.

Taking matters into her own hands, she reported the issue to the erstwhile BBMP, which paid off within two days. Shahnaaz also conducted a streetlight audit in her locality. "Using a 15-30 minute chatbot-based tool, I recorded the number of functioning and non-functioning lights, their placement, and their impact on safety, particularly for women and children," the Gopalpura resident said.

She also explained that there were initial backlashes within her locality, with neighbours not cooperating with her due to her young age.

Why did her team distribute 1,400 paper bags?

Chandu A, a 20-year-old B.Com final-year student of BES College, worked on issues such as waste management, reducing plastic use, and promoting sustainable alternatives in the community.

After completing her schooling in her native place of Kolar, she found plastic and paper waste a serious threat to the environment in Bengaluru. When she visited Kadlekai Parishe last Nov, she found out that the vendors were using plastic covers. "In order to reduce plastic use, we, with our college, took the initiative to run a campaign called 'Say No To Plastic'. We made paper bags using newspapers. As part of a GBA campaign, we successfully distributed 1,400 paper bags to vendors. By using these paper bags, they reduced the use of plastic covers to some extent," she explained.

15-year-old student took on garbage burning and won

Maguluri Bhavishya, a 15-year-old class 9 student from Whitefield, worked on tree planting and water conservation. A student of Ramagondanahalli Govt School, she encountered constant smoke and odour due to the burning of rubbish around her school compound.

She took the initiative herself with support of her school and contacted GBA workers, ensuring the area was cleaned and beautified. During the next few months, her clean-ups continued inside the school compound, which also included a planting activity.

Bhavishya, at the age of six, shifted to Bengaluru with her parents, who now run a roadside food stall. "I'm originally from Andhra Pradesh. In my village near Ongole, I previously fought against caste discrimination in schools. Due to that, I always have the will to question the problems in society. While my parents were scared initially, now they support me."

From survey to action: 24-yr-old on mission to keep toilets clean

Navyashree GB, 24, a X-ray technician noticed in April 2025 that commuting by bus became unsafe and risky for women at Krishnarajanagara in Mysuru.

She found out that the KSRTC bus stand was full of filth and lacked lighting. "There was no safety for women there. The washrooms for women were unusable and unclean. Taking a bus from there was very difficult. The women's waiting room turned into a storage room," she said.

Along with her team of around 50 people, Navyashree conducted surveys, speaking to female commuters to understand their requirements. Following the survey, the team of youths approached the local MLA D Ravishankar. This initiative addressed the poor and unsafe infrastructure there.

"The job is not fully done. Our team is still monitoring the bus stand every day to make sure the facilities are properly maintained," she further added.

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Amid fiscal strain, CM faces renewed pressure to tweak guarantee schemes

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Bengaluru: The govt is facing renewed pressure from governing Congress members to review its flagship guarantee schemes ahead of the state budget on March 6, with some party legislators and ministers arguing that benefits should be targeted only at economically weaker sections to reduce the fiscal burden.

NOT ALL ROSES: Chief minister Siddaramaiah and DK Shivakumar in Karwar on Sunday. The CM promised to sanction a superspeciality hospital for the region in his forthcoming budget

Many Congress MLAs have said the schemes, a cornerstone of the party's thumping victory in the 2023 assembly polls, are too broad and even benefit households that do not require state support. Some MLAs have also floated a "give it up" approach, under which affluent beneficiaries voluntarily opt out so that resources can be redirected to the needy.

The debate has intensified following recent Supreme Court observations on state-funded freebies, raising questions over whether chief minister Siddaramaiah's govt will introduce riders or eligibility filters.

The five guarantees — free electricity up to 200 units for all households under Gruha Jyoti, free bus travel for women under Shakti, monthly cash transfers to women heads of households under Gruha Lakshmi, unemployment assistance under Yuva Nidhi, and free food grains under Anna Bhagya — cost the state between Rs 55,000 crore and Rs 60,000 crore annually.

Public works minister Satish Jarkiholi last year said excluding the wealthy from the schemes could save at least Rs 10,000 crore a year. Industry and infrastructure minister MB Patil has also supported revising eligibility norms to focus on below-poverty-line households. Several MLAs have raised concerns in recent legislature party meetings as well.

The fiscal debate over the guarantees dates to the govt's first year in office. A senior bureaucrat had earlier suggested implementing the schemes in phases, citing an annual cost of about Rs 50,000 crore, but Congress party bosses opted for a full rollout, calling the guarantees a key poll commitment.

The state has since undertaken multiple revenue-raising measures, including hikes in bus fares, fuel prices, property guidance values, stamp duty, liquor prices and vehicle cess, along with proposals to increase water tariffs, milk prices and public transport fares. The govt also introduced a minimum alternate tax law and a one-time settlement scheme, which have had limited impact.

In the 2025-26 budget, the govt allocated about Rs 51,034 crore for the five guarantee schemes, slightly lower than the Rs 52,009 crore provided in 2024-25. The total estimated expenditure for 2025-26 was pegged at just over Rs 4 lakh crore, with revenue expenditure of about Rs 3.1 lakh crore, capital expenditure of Rs 71,336 crore, and Rs 36,474 crore for loan repayment. The state planned to borrow about Rs 1.2 lakh crore, with total liabilities projected to rise to Rs 7.6 lakh crore.

Last year, several ministers and MLAs publicly flagged concerns about shrinking funds for constituency-level development projects, but Siddaramaiah ruled out scrapping the schemes.

With a series of local body polls, including Greater Bengaluru Authority polls, due this year, a debate is unfolding again. While some MLAs argue limiting benefits would provide headroom for development spending, the govt credits the guarantees with boosting economic activity. "These are strategic investments made on economic and social principles. This has helped the state improve its per capita income," Siddaramaiah had said.

Min: Chaos forced us to move meetings to K'taka Bhavan

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The war of words between Congress and BJP over the AI Impact Summit intensified, with Priyank Kharge joining the criticism and accusing the Centre of sidelining southern states that are driving India's AI growth.

Priyank Kharge & Mohandas Pai

AI SUMMIT

IT-BT minister Priyank, son of AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post on social media, alleged mismanagement at the summit.

"Listen to the startups, exhibitors and more importantly the foreign delegates on their opinion about the India AI Impact Summit 2026. You will not need AI, just common sense to understand this debacle. Also, I still haven't spoken to the opportunities the state has missed because of the extreme mismanagement of the central govt (sic)," he said.

Priyank Sunday told TOI that logistical issues forced Karnataka to relocate its meetings from Bharat Mandapam, the venue of the summit, to Karnataka Bhavan. "We were forced to shift our meetings on the last two days as delegations could not even reach our staging area," Priyank said. "Some delegations that were scheduled to meet us at our stall, could not make it and only met us after the event. It was chaotic for a global event."

Despite the alleged disruptions, Priyank said the state held discussions with global firms including Mistral AI, Google, Harvey, ElevenLabs, Disney, and Anthropic.

But former Infosys CFO and IT industry veteran TV Mohandas Pai said the minister was being "petty", although he acknowledged some shortcomings in managing the event. "Many of our investee companies, associates, and friends were there," Pai said. "Yes, there was overcrowding, some bad management, and security handedness, but it does not take away from the unprecedented scale and attendance at the event. It is a great success for India and Karnataka. Always making negative comments does you no good."

Pai said investors do not come to Karnataka "because of the minister". "Many of us talk to them to get them here," he said.

Siddaramaiah: JD(S) is against Vokkaligas

A day after Union minister HD Kumaraswamy, also JD(S) state president, had criticised Siddaramaiah for suggesting he was being "targeted" because of his caste, the CM hit back, saying: "I have taken his allegation — that I dragged caste into the picture for the sake of the CM post — lightly." He added: "Kumaraswamy and his father (former PM HD) Deve Gowda are certainly not casteists. They are only against their own caste. They are also family-centric." He said JD(S) has never promoted Vokkaliga. "If one day a Vokkaliga other than a member of Deve Gowda's family becomes CM, it will be through Congress," he said.

When Delhi calls, I have to go: DKS

Bengaluru: Days after returning from Delhi, deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar has been summoned again by Congress' high command to the national capital later this week, fuelling fresh political speculation in the state.

Responding to talk of another visit to Delhi, Shivakumar Sunday downplayed it saying: "My going to Delhi is routine. If not me, who will go? When the high command and Rahul Gandhi (Lok Sabha LoP)-call, you must go," he said.

In Karwar later, Shivakumar declined to comment on his trip. He also urged supporters and family members not to speculate on the matter. "Be it Iqbal (Hussein) or Ravi (MLC), if they remain quiet, then all good things will happen for me," he said.

Senior functionaries indicated that both Shivakumar and chief minister Siddaramaiah have been asked to be in Delhi later this week, with the party being expected to address ongoing speculation of a possible CM change in the state.

Meanwhile, Shivakumar revealed Congress would organise a mega convention in Chikkaballapur as part of its 'MGNREGA Bachao' protest.

"Besides me, chief minister Siddaramaiah, AICC general secretary Randeep Surjewala, MLAs and others will attend," he said. "This will be only for the districts of Chikkaballapur and Kolar, with similar such conventions planned across the state." TNN

Revenue dept mulls township on land reclaimed by forest dept

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Bengaluru: Nearly a year after the forest department reclaimed 120 acres of land in Kadugodi from encroachers, the revenue department is considering handing over the exact same piece of land to Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) for a proposed hi-tech industrial layout.

The move has riled conservationists, and it comes barely a week after the state govt told the joint session of the legislature the land exclusively belonged to the forest department.

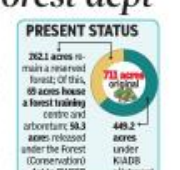
Last week, the revenue department issued notices to stakeholders to explore the possibility of transferring the 120 acres in survey No.1 of Kadugodi Plantation to KIADB. A high-level meeting, attended by additional chief secretary (forest, environment and ecology), principal secretary (commerce and industries), Bengaluru Urban deputy commissioner, special deputy commissioner (KI-ADB), and the tahsildar of Bengaluru East (KR Puram), was also held on the issue.

"A year ago, the forest department removed encroachments and began afforestation based on court directions. How can the revenue department now hold a meeting to transfer the same land to KIADB without denotification?" asked a Bengaluru-based activist.

Forest department sources said the issue was raised during the recent joint session of the legislature, where the forest department submitted a detailed reply tracing the land's history from the Mysore maharaja's era to present day.

"During the joint session, CN Ashwath Narayan, Malleswaram MLA, alleged diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes, including industrial development. In response, the forest minister categorically denied such a move and said in writing that the 120 acres in survey No. 1 could not be used for non-forest activities," an activist said.

Incidentally, the forest department is in the process of filing a curative petition before the Supreme Court seeking reclamation of 449.2 acres allotted by KIADB.



OWNERSHIP SAGA

1896-1901 — Entire 711 acres of Kadugodi Plantation (survey No. 1) was notified as a state forest by Mysore govt, culminating in a Jan 7, 1901 notification granting it reserved forest status

1953 — Little more than 572 acres was handed over to Kadugodi Joint Farming Co-operative Society (KFCS) for cultivation. No ownership rights were transferred; the govt retained absolute ownership.

1970 — KIADB notified 148.2 acres as industrial area; notification did not acknowledge the lands reserved forest status, and no acquisition was completed under Section 28(4) of the KIAD Act

1971 — Another 141 acres, previously under British military control, was transferred to KIADB by Mysore State Reserve Police

1980 — Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 mandates prior approval of the central govt for diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes

1983-1985 — Due to irregularities, an order was passed to liquidate KIFCS on Dec 31, 1982; in 1985, KIADB compensated 186 members at Rs 38,000 per acre and acquired 301 acres and 34 guntas (though revenue records reflected only 209 acres and 4 guntas). In total, KIADB acquired 448.2 acres for industrial purposes, raising allegations of violation of forest laws

1990-2006 — Some 200 society members filed cases claiming ownership rights over the land. DC ruled that the land belongs to the govt and ordered correction of RTC entries to reflect govt ownership

2012-2015 — HC affirms land was never granted to the society or its members. No further appeals were filed, making the order final

2012-2015 — A govt order clarifies the land continues to remain forest; KIADB's possession was limited to 448.2 acres

2025 — SC reiterates that state govt can alter status of reserved forest or permit non-forest use only with prior approval from Centre. It also said forest land held by revenue authorities must be transferred to forest department

Motor vehicle claim not maintainable: HC

▶ Continued from page 1

Justice P Sree Sudha said that for any victim in an accident, she can file a claim petition either under Employees Compensation Act or under Motor Vehicles Act. Once the option under Employees Compensation Act was exercised and an award obtained in 2008, it became an executable order against the owner and employer of the deceased.

The family members of the deceased are at liberty to execute the award passed in their claim petition filed under Employees Compensation Act.

Therefore, the filing of motor vehicle claim case itself is not maintainable and is liable to be set aside, the court said, allowing the appeal filed by the insurer.

8-yr-old swallows Ludo piece, chokes to death

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mangaluru: An eight-year-old girl choked to death after swallowing a cuno-shaped plastic piece from a Ludo board game.

The deceased, Thanishka R Gatti, was the daughter of Rajesh Gatti and Rajeshwari, originally from Uliyathadka, Madhur, in Kasaragod district. The incident occurred at their rented house in Kolya, near Thokkottu, on Saturday.

Police said Thanishka, who was playing Ludo with her siblings, accidentally swallowed the plastic piece and began choking this afternoon. Her mother, a teacher at a school in Ullal, had moved the family to Kolya due to her job. With the school closed, Thanishka was at home playing with her brother and sister.

As her condition worsened, her mother, with the help of neighbours, rushed her to a private hospital in Thokkottu.

She was then shifted to another private hospital in Derulakatte, where doctors declared her dead.

Thanishka was a Class 2 student at St Sebastian High School, Thokkottu.

PM hails export of K'taka horti produce to Maldives

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

PM Narendra Modi Sunday hailed the recent initiative to export Nanjangud bananas (Nanjangud rasabale), Mysuru veelyadele (betel leaves), and Indi lemons to the Maldives. "These products are known for their taste and quality and received the geographical Indication (GI) tag. Today's farmer seeks quality, but is also increasing quantity, and is making his mark as well," he stated in his 131st episode of 'Mann Ki Baat'.

According to BN Gnanesh, senior scientist and head, genetics and plant breeding, ICAR-IISR Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Suttur, the banana growers will soon be trained in packing the fruit, which is critical during export. "A plan to provide training will be taken up in collaboration with the horticulture department," he said.

Mysuru MP Yaduveer Wadiyar, said, "It is a matter of immense pride for Mysuru and surrounding farming communities. The growing international demand for these unique agricultural products not only ensures premium price realisation for farmers, but also reinforces the importance of preserving traditional cultivation practices that define their distinct quality and identity."

Activists see red over law shrinking lakes' buffer zones, say it helps real estate mafia

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Bengaluru: The govt's notification of an amended law reducing lake buffer zones received sharp criticism from Bengaluru's activists working on lake conservation.

The Karnataka Tank Conservation and Development Authority (Amendment) Act, 2026 replaces the existing uniform buffer zone of 30m around lakes with extents of buffers based on the size of the waterbodies.

Tanks with an area above 100 acres will continue to have the 30m buffer. The buffer will be 24m for lakes of 25-100 acres, 12m for 10-25 acres, 6m for 1-10 acres and 3m for 0.1-1 acre. In addition to changes in buffer zones, the amendment also allows the construction of roads, bridges, water supply lines, high tension towers, and other infrastructure. However, permission for construction can be given only after ensuring that the original capacity of the tanks is not reduced.

No impact on Ulsoor Lake: City corp

SOME RELIEF: Ulsoor lake will retain 30m buffer, says officials

A senior official of Bengaluru Central city corporation said that there are only four lakes in the limits of the civic body: Ulsoor (106 acres), Kaggadasapura (47 acres), Kolagina Byrasandra (12 acres), and Chickpet Byrasandra (15 acres). Of these, only Ulsoor Lake will retain the 30m buffer. Kaggadasapura Lake will retain 24m, and the rest will have 12m buffer zones.

Sandeep Anirudhan, convenor of the movement 'Bengaluru Town Hall', tore into the govt for notifying the amendment when the matter is pending in the National Green Tribunal. NGT took suo motu cognisance of the amendment and issued notices to the state govt. "This is not just about Bengaluru lakes, but affects 45,000 lakes across the state. In the long run, the reduction of buffer zones will result in a flood and livelihood crisis due to its adverse impact on agriculture and fisheries," he said.

Anirudhan added the decision was taken to help the real estate mafia. "Buffer zones protect lakes from the contamination that accompanies development. These zones also hold most of the green cover. Reducing this will render the lakes unusable in a few years. Small lakes will disappear," he added.

Co-founder of Friends of Lakes, Madhuri Subbarao, challenged the logic behind reducing buffer zones for smaller lakes. "Small lakes fill up much faster during intense rainfall. The existing 30m buffer acts as a crucial safety shield, protecting nearby residents and infrastructure during breaches. Reducing buffer zones based merely on size is not a scientific or hydrologically sound approach," she said.

Subbarao urged the govt to address the lack of planning instead of resorting to building roads, drains, and other infrastructure on buffer zones. "Lakes cannot continue to be the casualties of unchecked development, nor should critical environmental decisions be made without transparent public consultations and ecological expertise guiding policy," she added.

AS LARGEST CONSTITUENT OF ALLIANCE, SENA UBT HAS 'FIRST RIGHT' TO MVA'S RS SEAT: SANJAY RAUT

SHARAD PAWAR ADMITTED TO PUNE HOSPITAL WITH DEHYDRATION-RELATED SYMPTOMS, IS STABLE

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Tip from richa.gandhi@timesofindia.com

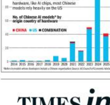
Scan for more hacks

Leopard kills 16-yr-old feeding cattle

A Class 8 student died after a leopard attacked him while he was feeding cattle outside his house in Sundernagar Bhogpur Dam area in Jaspur on Saturday evening, reports **Aakash Ahuja**. Amreek Singh, 16, son of daily wager Shailendra Singh, was the second of three siblings. Family members said he had returned from school and stepped out around 4pm to feed cattle when the leopard attacked him.

STATISTICS A slice of life in numbers

How much of China's AI depends on US?



*Refers to models whose developers include a Chinese organisation; Source: US Council of Economic Advisers

India Inc's boardrooms still a men's club: Report

'Women Want To Lead, But Corporates Slowing Their Climb'

Manash.Gohain
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Corporate India is facing a leadership paradox — women's ambition to lead remains strong, but the systems meant to elevate them are losing momentum.

A new report by All India Management Association (AIMA) and KPMG-India showed that while 79% of women aspire to leadership roles and over half aim for the C-suite, progress on representation is slowing, with 30% of companies reporting no increase, or even a decline, in women leaders over the last five years, nearly double the figure in 2024.

Even today, 10% of organisations surveyed have no women at all in leadership roles, highlighting how uneven the gains remain across corporate India.

The Women Leadership in Corporate India 2026 report, based on a survey of over 200 professionals across sectors and company sizes, pointed to a widening gap between intent and outcomes. Despite years of diversity pledges and formal 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)' policies, only 1% of women currently occupy board-level positions, underscoring how ambition sharply thins out at the very top.

Data suggested the problem is not entry or aspiration, but progression. Nearly three-fourths of organisations reported that less than 30% of their long-tenured female employees rise to leadership roles, while men advance in far greater numbers within the same firms. The study flags middle and senior management as the most vulnerable stage, with 65% of respondents saying women are most likely to exit the workforce mid-career.

"Women's ambition is strong and sustained, but meaningful progress depends on intentional organisational design, transparent systems, consistent sponsorship, and leadership accountability," the report noted, pointing to structural bottlenecks rather than individual choice as the main constraint.

While representation at the top has improved marginally, the pace has clearly slowed. In 2024, 83% of organisations said they had increased the number of women leaders over the previous five years. By 2026, that figure fell to around 70%, with the rest reporting stagnation or decline. "The pace of change has decelerated," the report observed, warning that early gains may be plateauing.

Perceptions of fairness have also worsened. Only 28% of employees believe leadership promotions are fair and transparent, down from 38% in 2024, even as more firms claim to have formal evaluation processes. At the same time, 36% of respondents feel management tends to favour men for certain leadership roles, particularly those involving high pressure or long hours.

The disconnect is visible in leadership development too. Though companies often highlight training programmes as a key intervention, half of women surveyed said they did not participate in any leadership development programme in the past year, raising questions about access, sponsorship and reach.

"Leadership diversity will not improve unless organisations intentionally strengthen the path to leadership, ensuring women have real opportunities to rise — not just enter the workforce," the report cautioned.

As Indian companies prepare for a future shaped by technology, AI and demographic change, the message is blunt — without fixing promotion pathways and mid-career attrition, diversity gains risk stalling well before the boardroom.

'Caste' attack leaves 2-month-old dead in Telangana village, 3 held

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Hyderabad: A two-month-old baby died on Saturday after her family from the Chakali community, classified as backward classes, was allegedly assaulted by a group of men for refusing to pay Rs 100 to enter a temple, where entry is typically free, during a religious fair in Telangana, police said on Sunday.

The alleged attack took place on Feb 16 during Kummera jatara in Kummera village of Nagarkurnool district.

In a police complaint, Chilukeshwaram Chandrakala said men abused the family with caste slurs, called them "lower caste", and beat her younger son Ganesh. She alleged four men attacked Ganesh with a metal rod used to break coconuts, dragged family members by the hair, and threw them to the ground.

The mother placed the infant at the feet of the attackers, pleading for mercy. The baby was critically wounded in the melee

As the assault continued, Chandrakala said her daughter-in-law, Mounika, placed the infant at the feet of the attackers, pleading for mercy. The baby was critically wounded in the melee, according to the complaint.

Chandrakala alleged gold earrings, silver bangles and a mobile phone were taken, and the family was threatened with demolition of their house if they returned to Kummera village. Fearing reprisal, they sought refuge in Nagarkurnool town.

The family and supporters of Dharma Samaj Party staged protests in Nagarkurnool, demanding arrests and charges under stringent caste atrocity laws. "The family was targeted because they refused to work as bonded labourers. They were attacked earlier too," DSP functionary V Shiva Maharaj said.

Police said an FIR was lodged and three men were arrested. Officers said the case was initially registered for suspicious death, causing hurt, intentional insult to provoke breach of peace, and related procedures.

After investigators learned that Mounika belonged to a Scheduled Caste, police added charges under the SC/ST Act along with attempt to murder. An autopsy was conducted on the infant. "We will decide on further investigation on the basis of the postmortem result," a police officer said.

Police said a counter-complaint by the opposite party led to a separate case against Ganesh.

Man stabbed for 'speaking Bengali' in MP

Malda: A man from West Bengal's Malda was stabbed in Madhya Pradesh earlier this week, allegedly for speaking Bengali, reports **Subhro Maitra**. He is under treatment at Bundelkhand hospital after undergoing a surgery.

Syed Sk (37) had been working as a cloth vendor in Sagar for the past nine years. On Feb 19, he was allegedly robbed and stabbed multiple times. His wife, Nurefa Biwi, claimed he had recently expressed apprehension after being taunted for speaking in Bengali.

TMC MP Samirul Islam, chairman of West Bengal Migrant Workers' Welfare Board, said, "We arranged for his treatment. An FIR has also been lodged. We are looking after him and his family."

Sahidur Rahman, a member of the welfare board, said, "Workers have regularly been tortured in BJP-governed states for speaking Bengali over the last few months."

Sisters die of 'poisoning' hours before wedding

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Jodhpur: Two sisters, both brides-to-be, died hours before their wedding in Rajasthan's Jodhpur on Saturday. The deceased, Shobha (25) and Vimla (23), were residents of Manai village. Both taught at a private school.

ADCP (West) Roshan Meena said wedding celebrations had continued at their house until late Friday. Around midnight, both sisters went to their room to sleep. Their health deteriorated suddenly around 4am, and family members rushed them to a private hospital in Jodhpur, where they were declared dead.

The family brought the bodies back home and began preparing for the last rites without a postmortem. On receiving this information, police reached the spot around 6am, stopped the cremation, and sent the bodies to MGH mortuary for autopsy. The remains were later handed over to the family.

A preliminary investigation suggested that the duo may have ingested a poisonous substance. Police were awaiting the postmortem report to nail the exact cause of death. No suicide note had been recovered till late on Saturday.

The family had begun preparing for last rites of Shobha and Vimla without an autopsy. Police stopped their cremation. No suicide note had been recovered till late Saturday

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I Arpita Kulkarni D/o Shashikant Kulkarni aged about 37 yrs residing at No.36, Girls School street Seshadripuram Bangalore-560020 have changed my name to ARPITA S KULKARNI vide affidavit dated 18/02/2026 sworn before notary S.R.Parameshivaiah

I, Panchangam LPS Sreegowri hereby inform that my name was incorrectly mentioned as Panchangam LPS Sreegowri in my 10th (SSLC) records. My correct name is Panchangam LPS Sreegowri. Henceforth, I shall be known as Panchangam LPS Sreegowri for all purposes.

I (SYED ALI BAKHER S/O MIR YADGAR ALI AGE 54 R/O ALIPUR VILLAGE GAURIBIDANUR TQ CHIKKABALLAPUR DISTRICT) HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO (SYED ALI BAKAR) FOR ALL PURPOSES

JAYASHREE GURURAJ, R/o No. 1366, 37th Cross, BSK II Stage, B.lore-70 changed my name to JAYASHREE HAMPIHOLI GANGADHAR vide affidavit dt.20/02/26 notary Padmanabha Rao.

I, Jabbar Sab Zabeer, S/o Jabbar Sab, House No. 123, 3rd Cross, 4th Main, Kathriguppe Kadirenahalli New Colony, Banashankari 2nd Stage, Bangalore-560070, have changed my name to Zabeer.

GENERAL

DECLARATION: I, Vimalkirti Ranjeet Deshmukh, holder of Passport No. P3325440, resident of No 306, S V Arcade, 2nd floor, 3rd cross, Near Unnati Centre, NGEF Layout, Sadanand Nagar, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560038, hereby declare that my father's name was incorrectly mentioned as "Ranjeet Deshmukh" in my passport. The correct spelling of my father's name is "Ranjit Deshmukh" as per my educational records. Both names refer to one and the same person.

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Beware of digital fraud, do KYC via official channels: PM in MKB

'Fraudsters Are Increasingly Targeting Innocent Citizens'

Manash Gohain
@timesofindia.com

PM Narendra Modi speaks during the inauguration of development projects, in Meerut on Sunday

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday issued a blunt warning against the growing menace of digital fraud and so-called "digital arrest" scams, flagging how ordinary people — from senior citizens to families saving for children's education — are being duped of their hard-earned money by cybercriminals.

Even as he cautioned people to stay vigilant and adhere to official banking processes, the PM used his monthly Mann Ki Baat address to spotlight a contrasting story of technology being used for national good — showcasing how artificial intelligence is helping India preserve, restore and reimagine its ancient knowledge systems for a global audience.

In his monthly radio address, Modi said fraudsters were increasingly targeting innocent citizens.

"In 'Mann Ki Baat', I have spoken to you at length about Digital Arrest... but still such incidents are happening around us, that are unpardonable," he said. "Many a time we come to know that a senior citizen has been swindled of their lifelong earnings."

The PM cautioned people against fake calls, messages and links disguised as official communication. "Someone calls up and says, 'I am a big officer. You have to share some details.' After this, innocent people do just that," he said, stressing that KYC or re-KYC should be completed "only through your bank branch, official app, and authorised medium". He urged citizens not to share OTPs, Aadhaar numbers or bank account information, adding: "most importantly, keep changing your password from time to time."

Modi also highlighted how India is blending cutting-edge technology with its civilisational heritage, drawing from demonstrations at the recently held Global AI Impact Summit in Delhi. "Leaders from all over the world were amazed to see how, with the help of AI, we are preserving our ancient texts, our ancient knowledge, our manuscripts and adapting them for today's generation," he said.

Citing the live demonstration of Sushruta Samhita, Modi explained the multi-step AI process showcased at the summit. "In the first step, it was shown how, with the help of technology, we are improving the image quality of manuscripts and making them readable," he said.

"In the second step, this image was converted into machine-readable text... the machine-readable text was read by an AI avatar... and further... this invaluable Indian knowledge can be translated into Indian and foreign languages," Modi said.

The PM said global leaders had showed "great interest in learning about India's ancient knowledge through a modern avatar.

Quit Congress to work for country and Assam, says ex-state chief Borah

Kangkan Kalita
@timesofindia.com

Borah addresses the BJP joining function at party headquarter at Basistha, in Guwahati on Sunday

Guwahati: Former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah joined BJP at the party headquarters in Guwahati Sunday, marking a high-profile defection before assembly elections. BJP has named Borah an executive member of its Assam unit.

Borah's induction followed a meeting with Union home minister Amit Shah and approval from former BJP chief JP Nadda, party functionaries said.

Borah said he quit Congress and "Duryodhan" to work for the country and Assamese society. "For me, interest of country, my land and its people stands above personal and party interest," he said, adding he joined BJP to support CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, whom he called North-east's most influential politician. Casting his move in epic terms, Borah said he would serve as a bridge for unhappy Congress workers "with self-respect" to join BJP. "I will act as Saraighat bridge for those Karnas of Rajiv Bhawan to come to Vajpayee Bhawan," he said, urging them to align with Pandavas before a Mahabharata war.

CM Sarma welcomed Borah and described him as Congress's "last Hindu leader" in Assam and said he would be fielded from a "favourable seat" to boost his prospects in polls. Borah is widely seen as a potential BJP candidate from Bihpuria, his home constituency in Lakhimpur district.

Sarma said Borah was beginning a new political phase aligned with BJP ideology and culture. "BJP family will stand with him," he said, recalling Borah's years of work in Congress.

Congress has become a burden for nation: PM

▸ Continued from P1

Modi pointed out that there were dissenting voices within the opposition bloc: Congress's INDIA bloc allies Samajwadi Party and RJD had distanced themselves from the protest at the AI summit.

"Congress broke all norms. It has become a burden for the country," he said, naming several other opposition parties like TMC, DMK, NC and BSP for not being part of this "sin". Congress functionaries are glorifying the protesters unabashedly instead of feeling embarrassed about the incident which "shamed" the nation, he said.

The PM then recalled the row over women MPs of Congress walking to his designated seat in Lok Sabha on Feb 4 amid the party's protest during the first half of the Budget session, which had prompted Speaker Om Birla to urge Modi to cancel his speech minutes before its scheduled start as he apprehended an unexpected incident.

"If you have to sit in the PM's chair, then you will have to first win people's hearts. You cannot become PM by sending women MPs to the seat and seizing it. What is your compulsion behind fronting women? Have you people become so hollow?" he said.

Congress is unable to perform in Parliament, he said, and is not letting others, even its allies, perform either. These parties have realised that they are the biggest victims of Congress's antics, he said.

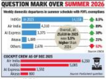
Modi lauds Kerala couple who donated organs of their 1-yr-old

New Delhi: PM Modi Sunday used 'Mann Ki Baat' to highlight the power of organ donation, sharing the story of a one-year-old from Kerala whose parents chose to donate her organs after her death.

"There can be no greater sorrow than parents losing their child," the PM said, referring to Aalin Sherin Abraham. He spoke of the unimaginable grief of losing a child so young. Yet, amid that pain, her parents, Arun Abraham and Sherin, decided to donate their daughter's organs — a decision he described as an act of immense courage and humanity. Modi said their choice reflected a large-hearted vision even in the face of personal tragedy. Aalin, he noted, may no longer be among us, but her name has now been added to the list of the country's youngest organ donors. TNN

Pilot duty exemptions weigh in heavy on DGCA's summer plan

QUESTION MARK OVER SUMMER 2026



Saurabh Sinha
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Aviation authorities have begun the process of determining how many flights — both domestic and international — will operate this summer. DGCA will weigh in pilot availability while approving summer schedules, effective March 29 to avoid a crisis like the one seen by IndiGo two months ago.

Determining pilot availability, however, is proving to be a tightrope walk as all major Indian carriers have got regulatory exemption from certain clauses of flight duty time limitation (FDTL) rules for cockpit crew. These exemptions lapse next month end. Airlines have sought an extension for the same and DGCA is reviewing their requests.

Airlines' ability to operate any given number of flights will depend on that decision. Withdrawing FDTL exemptions will mean fewer flights in peak summer travel season, higher fares and public outcry — something govt will be keen to avoid. And extending them will lead to concerns over fatigued crew stretching themselves, something that affects flight safety.

Pilots said the current situation has arisen primarily due to the fact that airlines have almost always had their way with the DGCA for getting exemptions.

Bengal trial court judges diverted to 45L SIR cases

Srishti Lakhotia & Kaushik Pradhan | TNN

Kolkata: Bengal's trial courts are preparing to absorb the burden of scrutinising 45 lakh disputed special intensive revision (SIR) cases, triggering concern that an already heavy backlog in the justice system will deepen.

District judges met magistrates and police chiefs Sunday to finalise procedures. Officials said 23 district judges and 150 senior judges have been released so far, while EC has asked for 294 judges — one for each assembly constituency. An EC official said a full list of disputed cases is yet to be handed to Calcutta high court.

'May slow trials'

Trial courts are carrying 3,879,176 pending cases, including 3,239,535 criminal matters. Judicial department sources said diversion of judges to SIR work may slow trials, pushing pendency higher. Sessions courts account for 204,553 pending cases statewide. Magisterial courts face 2,839,602 cases, with Kolkata alone at 1,386,113.

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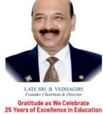

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ON RED CARPET: It Was Celebration Unlimited For Kannada Cinema As Shakhahaari Claimed The Prestigious Best Film Award And Prithvi Konanur Won Best Director Award For Hadinelentu

Blink, Shakhahaari Win Black Lady

Ankita Amar, who was declared Best Actress (critics) for Ibbani Tabbida Ileyali, thanks the jury and the audience for the prestigious award

Team TOI

The 70th Filmfare Awards South with Kerala Tourism lit up Kochi on Feb 21 in grand style and became the glittering stage for one of South Indian cinema's most-celebrated nights. Stars, performances, emotions and some well-deserved trophies made for an evening that reminded everyone about the magic of cinema. The milestone edition brought together the finest from Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam cinema under one spectacular roof.

The evening opened with a Kathakali performance that set the cultural tone before the glamour took over. Hosts Vishnu Warrier, RJ Mithun and Ranjini Haridas kept things lively through the night, their easy chemistry making for an engaging watch.

The stage saw spirited performances too, Sanya Malhotra on Viral Vayyari and Kurchi Madathapetti, Pranitha Subhash on Illuminati, Nidhhi Agerwal on Aacharey, Aparna Balamurali with a traditional Kerala number; and Trisha Shetty wrapping things up with Yama Yama.

Kannada cinema had plenty to celebrate on the night. While Sriimurali bagged the Best Actor in a leading role (male) for Bagheera, Askhatha Pandavapura walked away with the Best Actor in a leading role (female) for Koli Esru. Ankita Amar was adjudged Best Actress (critics) for Ibbani Tabbida Ileyali and Gowrishankar Srg got Best Actor (critics) for Kerebete.

Shakhahaari claimed the prestigious Best Film award, while Prithvi Konanur won Best Director for Hadinelentu, marking a strong showing in the top categories.

Krishnam Pranaya Sakhi swept the music categories with three awards: Best Music Album, Best Lyrics and Best Playback Singer (Male) underlining the industry's rich musical tradition.

Blink added two more to the tally, including Best Film (Critics) and Best Supporting Actor (Male) for Gopal Krishna Deshpande, rounding off a well-rounded and satisfying night for Kannada cinema.

Tamil cinema had also plenty to cheer about, with Amaran emerging as the night's biggest winner, sweeping eight awards including Best Film. Sivakarthikeyan took home Best Actor (Male), while Sai Pallavi claimed Best Actor (Female), dedicating her win to the real family behind the story. Parvathy Thiruvothu's Best Supporting Actress moment was made memorable as she invited her parents on stage and handed them the Black Lady.

Vikram was bestowed with the Outstanding Performance Award for Thangalaan, while Meiyazhagan followed with four awards.

Telugu cinema brought its own thunder: Pushpa 2: The Rule led the pack with five awards, including Best Film, with Allu Arjun completing a hat-trick of Best Actor wins, even treating the crowd to his iconic Pushpa pose on stage.

Amitabh Bachchan won Best Supporting Actor (Male) for Kalki 2898 AD, while Kajal Aggarwal took home Best Actress (Critics) for Satyabhama. Devara: Part 1, Kalki 2898 AD, Committee Kurrollu and Guntur Kaaram each secured two awards.

Malayalam cinema had its heart full. Mammootty claimed Best Actor (Male) for the atmospheric Bramayugam, his 16th Filmfare win and in a gesture that won every heart in the room, walked over to share his trophy with fellow nominees Asif Ali and Basil Joseph.

The night's most emotional moment came when a Lifetime Achievement Award was posthumously presented to the late Sreenivasan, the entire auditorium rising in silent tribute, mobile flashlights held aloft in his memory. Veteran lyricist Sreekumaran Thampi, whose pen has gifted Malayalam cinema over 3,000 songs, was equally honoured.

The red carpet, too, was a celebration in itself , Sai Pallavi, Kajal Aggarwal, Suhasini Maniratnam, GV Prakash and a host of stars from across industries adding glamour to an already-glittering evening.

The 70th Filmfare Awards South had Kerala Tourism as destination partner and was held in partnership with Kamar Film Factory. The Awards were co-powered by TTK Prestige and Sensodent DSP, with DNA - Designs Never Again Gold & Diamonds, Dazller Cosmetics, Double Bull, Aachi Masala and Arun Icecreams among the associate partners.

70th FILMFARE AWARDS SOUTH WITH KERALA TOURISM

KANNADA

BEST FILM | Shakhahaari

BEST DIRECTOR | Prithvi Konanur (Hadinelentu)

BEST FILM (CRITICS) | Blink (Srinidhi Bengaluru)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (MALE) Sriimurali (Bagheera)

BEST ACTOR (CRITICS) Gowrishankar Srg (Kerebete)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (FEMALE) Akshatha Pandavapura (Koli Esru)

BEST ACTRESS (CRITICS) Ankita Amar (Ibbani Tabbida Ileyali)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (MALE) Gopal Krishna Deshpande (Blink)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (FEMALE) Priya Shatamarshan (Bheema)

BEST MUSIC ALBUM Arjun Janya (Krishnam Pranaya Sakhi)

BEST LYRICS V Nagendra Prasad (Dwapara-Krishnam Pranaya Sakhi)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (MALE) Jaskaran Singh (Dwapara-Krishnam Pranaya Sakhi)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (FEMALE) Shruthi Prahlada (Hithalaka Karibyada Karatala Damanaka)

BEST DEBUT MALE Samarjit Lankesh (Gowri)

BEST DEBUT FEMALE Bindu Shivaram (Kerebete)

MALAYALAM

BEST FILM - Manjummel Boys

BEST DIRECTOR Rahul Sadasivan (Bramayugam)

BEST FILM (CRITICS) Ullozhukku (Christo Tomy), Kishkindha Kaandam (Dinjith Ayyathan)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (MALE) Mammootty (Bramayugam)

BEST ACTOR (CRITICS) Prithviraj (Aadujeevitham), Asif Ali (Kishkindha Kaandam)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (FEMALE) Urvashi (Ullozhukku)

BEST ACTRESS (CRITICS) Zarin Shihab (Attam)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (MALE) Vijayaraghavan (Kishkindha Kaandam)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (FEMALE) Lijomol Jose (Her)

BEST MUSIC ALBUM Sushin Syam (Aavesham)

BEST LYRICS Rafeeq Ahmed (Periyone-Aadujeevitham)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (MALE) Jithin Raj (Periyone-Aadujeevitham)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (FEMALE) Vaikom Vijayalakshmi (Angu Vaana Konilu-ARM)

BEST DEBUT DIRECTOR Joju George (Pani), Jithin Lal (ARM)

BEST DEBUT MALE K R Gokul (Aadujeevitham) Abhimanyu S Thilakan (Marco)

BEST DEBUT FEMALE Methil Devika (Katha Innuvare)

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY Sunil K S (Aadujeevitham)

BREAKTHROUGH IN FILMMAKING Anand Ekarshi (Attam)

CINE ICON AWARD Bhavana

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD Sreenivasan, Sreekumaran Thampi

TELUGU

BEST FILM | Pushpa 2: The Rule

BEST DIRECTOR | Sukumar (Pushpa 2: The Rule)

BEST FILM (CRITICS) | Lucky Baskhar (Venky Atluri)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (MALE) Allu Arjun (Pushpa 2: The Rule)

BEST ACTOR (CRITICS) Teja Sajja (Hanu-Man)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (FEMALE) Nivetha Thomas (35 Chinna Katha Kaadu)

BEST ACTRESS (CRITICS) Kajal Aggarwal (Satyabhama)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (MALE) Amitabh Bachchan (Kalki 2898 AD)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (FEMALE) Anjali (Gangs of Godavari)

BEST MUSIC ALBUM Devi Sri Prasad (Pushpa 2: The Rule)

BEST LYRICS Ramajogayya Sastry (Chuttamalle-Devara: Part 1)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (MALE) Sri Krishna (Kurchi Madathapetti-Guntur Kaaram)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (FEMALE) Shilpa Rao (Chuttamalle-Devara: Part 1)

BEST DEBUT DIRECTOR Yadhu Vamsee (Committee Kurrollu)

BEST DEBUT MALE Sandeep Saroj (Committee Kurrollu)

BEST DEBUT FEMALE Nayan Sarika (Gam Gam Ganesha)

BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN Prithviraj (Aadujeevitham) Ramakrishna & Monika (Pushpa 2: The Rule)

BEST CHOREOGRAPHY Sekhar Master (Kurchi Madathapetti-Guntur Kaaram)

TAMIL

BEST FILM | Amaran

BEST DIRECTOR P S Vinothraj (Kottukkaali) Rajkumar Periasamy (Amaran)

BEST FILM (CRITICS) Meiyazhagan (C Prem Kumar)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (MALE) Sivakarthikeyan (Amaran)

BEST ACTOR (CRITICS) Arvind Swami (Meiyazhagan)

BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE (FEMALE) Sai Pallavi (Amaran)

BEST ACTRESS (CRITICS) Anna Ben (Kottukkaali)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (MALE) Karthi (Meiyazhagan)

BEST ACTOR IN A SUPPORTING ROLE (FEMALE) Parvathy Thiruvothu (Thangalaan) Swasika (Lubber Pandhu)

BEST MUSIC ALBUM G V Prakash Kumar (Amaran)

BEST LYRICS Uma Devi (Yaaro Ivan Yaaro-Meiyazhagan)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (MALE) Haricharan (Hey Minnale-Amaran)

BEST PLAYBACK SINGER (FEMALE) Shweta Mohan (Hey Minnale-Amaran)

BEST DEBUT DIRECTOR Suresh Mari (J Baby) Tamizharasan Pachamuthu (Lubber Pandhu)

BEST DEBUT MALE Hridhu Haroon (Thugs)

BEST DEBUT FEMALE Sri Gouri Priya (Lover)

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY Ch Sai (Amaran)

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE (TAMIL) Vikram (Thangalaan)

Cops seize 10 mobile phones filled with radicalising content

▸ Continued from page 1

The posters eulogised slain terrorist Burhan Wani and had slogans like "India stop genocide & Free Kashmir", while others contained Urdu slogans which, when translated, stated "Hum Pakistani Hain, Pakistan Hamara Hai" (We are Pakistani, Pakistan is ours) and celebrated "Kashmir Solidarity Day".

A case was registered and investigation was transferred to the special cell. A team comprising ACP Lalit Mohan Negi, inspectors Sunil Rajain and Dheeraj was formed to trace the digital and physical trail left by the perpetrators.

The initial investigation was conducted by DCP Kushal Pal Singh's team from the Metro Police.

By conducting technical analysis of mobile data and transit patterns, the suspects were located in Kolkata. On Feb 15, the special cell identified a hideout in the Majherpara area of Hatiara Gote, Kolkata. In a swift raid, the first two suspects were apprehended: 31-year-old Umar Faruk, a resident of Aswintola in Malda, West Bengal, and 31-year-old Robiul Islam, a Bangladeshi national from the Thakur Gaon district.

During interrogation, Faruk revealed a chilling timeline of radicalisation and intent besides the location of his aides. On Feb 21, simultaneous raids were conducted in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu and six suspects were nabbed. The arrested individuals were identified as 33-year-old Mohammed Mizanur Rehman from Bogura district, 34-year-old Mohammed Sefayat Hossain from Jhalakathi district, 40-year-old Mohammed Zahidul Islam from Bogura, 40-year-old Mohammed Liton from Bogura, 27-year-old Mohammed Uzzal from Bogura, and 32-year-old Umar from Bogura.

In addition to the posters, police seized 10 mobile phones filled with radicalising content, 25 credit and debit cards, 5 POS machines used for clandestine financial transactions, and original Bangladeshi passports and identity cards that the suspects had attempted to discard or hide.

Probe revealed that in Dec 2025, Faruk had conducted reconnaissance of vital installations and important locations across India.

He was required to send video evidence of these surveys back to the handler in Bangladesh to prove the vulnerability of the targets.

Following a successful reconnaissance mission, Faruk was summoned to Bangladesh to meet his handler in person, where he was tasked with recruiting more illegal Bangladeshi migrants residing in India. Faruk rented an edpensi apartment in Kolkata and established the hideout as a central base for terror activities and was actively seeking local sources to arrange weapons for future strikes.

On Feb 6, Faruk and Robiul Islam flew from Kolkata to Delhi via a connecting flight in Patna. On the night of Feb 7, they affixed posters at 10 different locations in the capital before fleeing back to Kolkata by train the next morning.

They filmed their actions and sent the footage to their handler, who congratulated them on their success and ordered them to repeat the act in Kolkata, where they subsequently affixed more posters before their arrest.

Army units from CIF Delta with J&K Police, CRPF led operation

▸ Continued from page 1

Army units from CIF Delta, working with J&K police and CRPF, led the operation. A spokesperson for White Knight Corps said troops "dominated" the site and re-engaged after contact was re-established Sunday morning.

Udhampur and Kishtwar districts have seen repeated gunfights since mid-Jan, leaving several terrorists dead, including three on Feb 4. The latest action came under a single ongoing campaign, code-named Operation Trashi-I, launched after a Jan 18 gunfight that killed a paratrooper and wounded seven soldiers. The sweep followed multiple contacts over the past months as forces tracked a group believed to be moving between Sonnar, Janseer-Kandiwar, Dachaan and nearby high ground.

A hideout was discovered on Jan 19, intensifying seek-and-shoot efforts.

HC acquits man convicted of abetting wife's suicide

▸ Continued from page 1

HC has acquitted a man convicted of abetting his wife's suicide, 15 years after his conviction by a sessions court.

The prosecution had alleged that "the husband's conduct, including doubting her character and subjecting her to mental harassment, created circumstances that drove her to take the extreme step". Though the trial court acquitted him of dowry charges, sessions convicted him for abetment of suicide, holding that "his suspicion amounted to mental cruelty".

His counsel argued that conviction under IPC Section 306 requires proof of instigation, conspiracy, or intentional aid with criminal intent.

Move to replace statue part of reform: PM

▸ Continued from page 1

Modi announced that a statue of C Rajagopalachari, a freedom fighter who became the first and only Indian governor general after independence before the post was scrapped in the new republic in 1950, will replace that of Lutyens on Monday.

"His (Rajagopalachari) conduct, self-restraint, and independent thinking in public life inspire us even today. Unfortunately, even after independence, statues of British administrators were allowed to remain in Rashtrapati Bhavan, but those of the nation's greatest sons were denied space," he said.

The Prime Minister said it is continuation of his push to rid the country of slave mentality — a call he had given from Red Fort — and accord primacy to India's own legacy and traditions.

'Rajaji Utsav' will be celebrated at Rashtrapati Bhavan and the statue will be inaugurated at its Central Courtyard, he said, lauding Rajagopalachari — the close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and former CM of the erstwhile Madras State — as someone who saw power not as a position but as a service.

On Lutyens, architect A K Jain said the idea of a planned New Delhi emerged only after the 1911 capital shift announcement, amid the city's haphazard growth.

Kin: Crash site accident-prone due to lax rule enforcement

▸ Continued from P 1

The crash occurred around 3.50am along a stretch of NH-49 that is notoriously accident-prone due to heavy traffic and allegedly lax enforcement of road rules, a relative of one of the deceased said.

Additional SP Madhushikta Mishra said a case had been registered and police were investigating what led to the fatal SUV-truck collision.

Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati and CM Mohan Charan Majhi condoled the deaths.

Day after Devji, top Red Raji 'surrenders' with 50 rebels

U Sudhakarreddy, Debabrata Mohapatra & Hrusikesh Mohanty | TNN

Hyderabad\Bhubaneswar\Berhampur: Malla Raji Reddy alias Sangram, a central committee and politburo member of CPI (Maoist), has reportedly surrendered before Telangana Police along with 50 cadres, sources said Sunday, a day after another rebel top gun Devji was believed to have laid down arms. The surrenders came as 2 rebels were killed in Odisha's Kandhamal amid intensified operations ahead of the Centre's push to eliminate Maoists by March 31 this year.

Officials described the 76-year-old Raji Reddy's surrender as a major setback to the banned outfit in Telangana, where he had a bounty of Rs 25 lakh on his head. Devji, believed to be CPI Maoist general secretary and central committee member, reportedly surrendered in Mulugu.

Official announcements on the surrenders are likely in the presence of chief minister A Revanth Reddy or DGP Shivadhar Reddy on Tuesday or Wednesday.

Among the 50 cadres reported to have surrendered along with Raji Reddy are senior and middle-level Maoists. Officials said several weapons were seized from them, including AK-47s and INSAS rifles. Sources said some of the rebels shown as having surrendered were actually arrested in Telangana and later persuaded to turn themselves in formally to the authorities.

Raji Reddy, known by several aliases, joined the Maoists in 1975. Sources said he had been operating in neighbouring Chhattisgarh but faced intensified operations there ahead of the Centre's March 31 deadline and moved to Telangana around a month ago. According to police records, Raji Reddy hails from Shatharajpalli village and is intermediate(Class 12) pass.

Maharashtra Airport Development Company Ltd.
CIN: U45203MH2002SGC136979

E-TENDER NOTICE

1. Invitation for e-Tender and e-Reverse Auction for up to 10 MW RTC Thermal Power vide Medium Term Procurement of Electricity on DEEP Portal for MIHAN SEZ, Nagpur.
2. Procurement of 10 MW Solar Power on Short Term Basis (from 01.04.2026 to 31.03.2027) through tariff based competitive bidding process on DEEP Portal for MIHAN SEZ, Nagpur.

The detailed advertisements no. 1 & 2 can be downloaded from the DEEP Portal on 23.02.2026 from 15:00 Hrs.

Vice Chairman and Managing Director

Government of Karnataka
DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRICAL INSPECTORATE
Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector, No. 135, 1st and 2nd Floor, 6th Cross Road, Gandhinagar, Bengaluru-560009

PUBLIC AWARENESS INFORMATION LIFT SAFETY RULES To be Known!

As per the provisions of The Karnataka Lifts, Escalators and Passenger Conveyors Act, 2012, and (Amendment) Act 2025, The Karnataka Lifts, Escalators and Passenger Conveyors Rule, 2015 and (Amendment) Rules 2017:

* Every owner of the Place intending to install Lift/Escalator/ Passenger Conveyor shall get his Lift /Escalator/ Passenger Conveyor erected and maintained by registered lift company only who is registered with the Department of Electrical Inspectorate.
* Every owner of a place intending to install a Lift/Escalator/ Passenger Conveyor in the State of Karnataka shall obtain erection permission from the authorised office and after installation owner shall obtain the license from the Department of Electrical Inspectorate before using the Lift/Escalator/ Passenger Conveyor.
* Every Lift running license shall be valid for a period of 10 years from the date on which it is granted and every owner of the Lift/Escalator/Passenger Conveyor shall renew the license before the expiry of the period of license.

For more details please visit website: www.ksei.karnataka.gov.in

DIPR/CP/5029/Zam/2025-26

Sd/-
Chief Electrical Inspector to Govt Bengaluru

13001/342/2026
ODISHA REAL ESTATE APPELLATE TRIBUNAL
A-1 Block, 7th Floor, Toshali Bhawan, Satyanagar, Bhubaneswar-751007
Contact details: Ph. No. 0674- 2571802, email: oreat.bbsr@gmail.com

QUOTATION/TENDER CALL NOTICE FOR HIRING OF VEHICLE

Odisha Real Estate Appellate Tribunal (OREAT), Bhubaneswar invites seal quotations/ tender for hiring of one Ciaz / Honda City (petrol) for official use of Technical/Administrative Member of OREAT, Bhubaneswar. The detailed Quotation /Tender call Notice and Documents can be downloaded from OREAT website (www.oreat.nic.in) from 23.02.2026 to 02.03.2026. The last date for receipt of quotations / tender in the office of OREAT is 07.03.2026 by 04.00 pm.

Sd/-
REGISTRAR
OREAT, BHUBANESWAR
OPR-13001/13/2001/25-26/0001

34001/110/2026
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
WORKS DEPARTMENT
E-mail - ceworldbankprojects@gmail.com
Bid Identification No. CE-BRIDGES 10/2025-26

1. The Chief Engineer (Bridges), Odisha on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for construction of Road & Bridge work as detailed below:
2. Nature of work : Bridge work
3. No. of work : 01 no.
4. Tender paper cost : Rs.10,000.00 (on-line)
5. Class of Contractor : A / Special Class Contractor
6. Available of bid document in the website : From 10.00 AM of 26.02.2026 to 5.00 PM of 17.03.2026
7. Date of opening of Bid : Dt.18.03.2026 at 11.30 AM
8. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: https://tenderodisha.gov.in. Any addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Sd/-
Chief Engineer, Bridges,
Odisha, Bhubaneswar
OPR-34001/34/74/1/25-26/0032

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY
SELECTION OF AGENCY FOR SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND MEDIA ANALYSIS SERVICES FOR SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

The undersigned, on behalf of the President of India, invites application from the interested parties/Agencies on prescribed application form for the following work:

Notice Inviting Application (NIA) No.	G.CPRO/SWR/SASMS/2026
Full Name of Service/Work	Selection of Agency for Social Media Management and Media Analysis Services For South Western Railway (for Two Years)
Appx. Total Cost of Service/Work (Exclusive of GST)	Rs. 2,51,00,000/- (Rs. Two Crore Fifty One Lakh Only) Exclusive of GST - per annum; or Rs. 5,02,00,000/- (Rs. Five Crore Two Lakh only) Exclusive of GST for two years.
Appx Total Cost of Service/Work (with GST)	Rs. 5,92,36,000/- with GST (Rs. Five Crore Ninety Two Lakh and Thirty Six Thousand Only) for two years.
Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 4,46,180/- (Rs. Four Lakh Forty Six Thousand One Hundred and Eighty Only)
Cost of Application Form	Rs. 10,000/- + 18% GST = Rs.11,800/- (Non-Refundable) (Rs. Eleven Thousand Eight Hundred only) in cash across the Railway Counter or if downloaded from website - Demand Draft/Pay Order in favor of PFA, South Western Railway, Hubballi. (In case if Application Form is required by Post – Rs. 500/- will be charged extra)
Last Date of downloading Application Form from SWR's official Website/purchase from PR Office	Up to 12.00 hrs. on 16/03/2026
Last Date/Time of submission of Application	Up to 11.00 hrs. 17/03/2026
Date & Time of Opening of Applications	On 17/03/2026 at 11.30 hrs. onwards
Venue for Application Submission and Application opening	CPRO Office, Rail Soudha, GM's Office Building, 4th Floor, Gadag Road, Hubballi, Karnataka – 580020.

Particulars of the Website from where the Application Form Procedure of Selection and Terms & Conditions etc. may be downloaded : www.swr.indianrailways.gov.in

PUB/519/AF/PR/SWR/2025-26 Chief Public Relation Officer / SWR / Hubballi

Download the RailOne app. RailOne is the all-in-one railway app by Indian Railways. Passengers can book reserved tickets, unreserved tickets, platform tickets and season passes, check PNR status, order food and access many more services at their fingertips. Use digital payments to book unreserved tickets through RailOne app. and enjoy upto a 3% discount.

South Western Railway - SWR | SWRRLY | SWRAILWAYHQ | sw_railways

Deported Bangladeshis slipping back into Mum

Police Worried Bengal Border Not Secure

Y.Narayan@timesofindia.com

One Rabiya Nasir Mulla will be deported for the second time. She told cops she crossed the border again via jungle and returned to Mumbai

Mumbai: Rabiya Nasir Mulla (46), who was among the 120-plus Bangladeshi nationals caught in Mumbai in the past 10 days, will be deported to her home country — for the second time. "Rabiya, who worked as a domestic help, lived in Mira-Bhayander area for 35 years before being deported on Aug 8, 2025, by Mira-Bhayander Vasai-Virar police. She said she managed to cross the border again by taking the jungle route and returned to Mumbai," said a Juhu police officer.

Rabiya is not an isolated case. Mumbai police have ramped up efforts to crack down on illegal immigrants, but they are concerned as the border in West Bengal does not seem to be secure enough and, allegedly after bribing border security, deported Bangladeshis managed to infiltrate back into India.

Across Maharashtra too, crackdown on illegal migrants has led to a surge in arrests in the past few years. In 2024 and 2025, 1,237 Bangladeshi infiltrators were detained from over 80 locations in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, Mira-Bhayandar, Panvel, Nagpur, Nashik, Pune and Nanded.

Joint CP (law & order) Satyanarayan Choudhary said the 93 police stations in Mumbai have intensified efforts to nab illegal immigrants. "The action has yielded results with 1,000-plus illegal immigrants being deported in 2025. Action continues with hundreds of caught in 2026 to be deported soon," he said.

Last week, police detained 21 Bangladeshis residing illegally in Andheri (W). "Since they are Bangladeshi citizens, we have submitted a report to the foreigners registration officer in Mumbai to take appropriate action and to deport them," said a cop.

Want to strengthen people-centric cooperation, India tells Bangladesh

Ahsan Tasnim | TNN

Dhaka: India on Sunday conveyed to the new Bangladesh govt that it wants to strengthen people-centric cooperation in all domains, working together in a positive, constructive and forward-looking manner, based on mutual interest and benefit.

Both sides have agreed to maintain regular and constructive engagement to further strengthen the bilateral relationship — which hit a low during the 18-month tenure of the Muhammad Yunus-led interim govt.

Delhi message was conveyed separately to foreign minister Khalilur Rahman and state minister for foreign affairs Shama Obaed by Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma.

Talking to reporters after the two meetings, Verma said they look forward to working together with Bangladesh in a forward looking manner. "So I think, of course, people-people exchanges are very important part of our bilateral relations," he said, noting that India really hopes to take things forward.

Boat with 1L banned cigarette packs seized off Guj, 4 Iranians detained

Ahmedabad: Indian Coast Guard (ICG) intercepted a suspicious foreign boat, seized around one lakh packets of banned cigarettes stored in 200 cartons, and apprehended four Iranian crew members in North Arabian Sea, nearly 135 nautical miles off Dwarka in Gujarat, Saturday. The boat was escorted to Porbandar for further probe.

The vessel, reportedly registered in Colombo, was identified as Al Mukhtar, although it transmitted a different name on its automatic identification system, raising suspicion and prompting an ICG patrol ship to close in for inquiry. The crew failed to produce valid documentation or provide a satisfactory explanation for their presence in Indian waters. The ICG also recovered a Thuraya satellite communication set, which is banned in India. TNN

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to notify the general public that our client intends to purchase all that piece and parcel of the immovable commercially converted property bearing Survey No.88/1 measuring 1 Acre 25 Guntas including 6 Guntas of Kharab, situated at Venkatala Village, Yelahanka Hobli, Yelahanka Taluk, Bengaluru Urban District, which is more fully described in the Schedule hereunder and hereinafter referred to as "Schedule Property" from its rightful owner.

Any person having any right, claim, title, interest in the Schedule Property or having any objection to the sale must notify the undersigned with documentary proof thereof within 21 days of this publication, failing which it shall be deemed that no person has any objection to our Client purchasing the Schedule Property.

SCHEDULE

(description of the Schedule Property)

All that piece and parcel of the immovable commercially converted property, more fully described in the table set out hereunder, bearing Survey No.88/1 measuring 1 Acre 25 Guntas, including 6 Guntas of Kharab, situated at Venkatala Village, Yelahanka Hobli, Yelahanka Taluk, Bengaluru Urban District.

Sl. No.	Sy. No.	Extent Acres	Extent Guntas	Owners	East	West	North	South
1	88/1	1	25	[illegible]	Road and Survey No.83	National Highway 7	Survey No. 58/3 and 58/4	Survey No.88/2

Abhijit Atur
M/s Agrasa Legal,
3rd Floor, Srinivasa Krishna Mansion, Ashoka Pillar Road, Jayanagar 2nd Block, Bengaluru - 560011.
Ph: (080) [illegible], Email: [illegible]

Date: 21.02.2026
Place: Bengaluru

SBI

NCLT & Policy Department, Stressed Assets Resolution Group (SARG), Corporate Centre, 21st Floor, Maker Tower-E, Cuffe Parade, Mumbai-400005.

REQUEST FOR APPLICATION FOR EMPANELMENT OF DETECTIVE AGENCY

Applications for empanelment are invited from Detective Agency throughout the country. For details on empanelment process, eligibility, other terms & conditions, etc., please visit our website https://sbi.bank.in/web/sbi-in-the-news/empanelment-of-vendors. Interested Detective Agency may apply in prescribed format and completed application must be delivered to the **NCLT & Policy Department, Stressed Assets Resolution Group (SARG), Corporate Centre, 21st Floor, Maker Tower-E, Cuffe Parade, Mumbai-400005** on or before 16.03.2026 by 5.00 p.m.

Place: Mumbai Sd/-
Date: 23.02.2026 **Deputy General Manager (NCLT & Policy)**

राष्ट्रीय न्यायालयिक विज्ञान विश्वविद्यालय
(राष्ट्रीय महत्व का संस्थान, गृह मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार)
National Forensic Sciences University
(An Institution of National Importance under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India)
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Date:23.02.2026

1. **Advt. No.:** NFSU/Technical Posts/01/2026: Online Applications are invited from Eligible & Qualified Candidates for **Direct Recruitment** for the Posts of ***Deputy Director, Assistant Director, Senior Scientific Officer, Junior Scientific Officer*** and ***Laboratory Assistant.***
2. **Advt. No.:** NFSU/Non-Academic/02/2026: Online Applications are invited from Eligible & Qualified Candidates for **Direct Recruitment** for the Posts of ***Section Officer, Deputy Section Officer*** and ***Assistant.***

Visit the Career Section of University Website www.nfsu.ac.in for more details.
Last Date to Apply Online: 23.03.2026 (11:59 PM).
Any Addendum/Corrigendum shall be posted on the Website only.

Sd/-
Executive Registrar

PUBLIC NOTICE

We are undertaking a title investigation on the immovable properties more fully described in the 'Schedule' hereto and hereinafter referred to as 'Schedule Properties'. The said title due diligence is being conducted for and on behalf of our Client who is desirous of entering into a development agreement with its present owners, namely (i) Mr. Abrar Ahmed, (ii) Mr. Sabir Ahmed, (iii) Mrs. Farlath Banu, (iv) Mrs. Nusrat Khan, (v) Mr. Nasir Ahmed, (vi) Mr. Shakir Ahmed, (vii) Mr. Zabir Ahmed, all children of Late Mohammed Abdul Hakeem (owners of Survey Nos. 19/1 and No. 19, 6 and 7) and (viii) Mr. Atheeq Sulaiman, son of Late Sulaiman Hashim (owner of Survey No. 3/2) ("Owners"). The Owners have represented to our Client that they are the absolute owners of the Schedule Properties and have unrestricted rights of alienation/development over the same.

Notice is hereby given to the general public that any person/s other than the present Owners asserting any right, title, charge, lien, claim or any interest whatsoever in respect of the Schedule Properties are hereby called upon to submit to the undersigned, their claims, if any, over the Schedule Properties or submit their objections, if any, to the aforementioned transaction. The said claim/s or objections must be in writing, together with documentary proof to support such claim/s or objections and must be delivered to us at the address given below within a period of 15 (fifteen) days from the date of publication of this Notice. If no such claim/s or objections are received, it shall be deemed that no one else other than the present Owners has/have any right, title, interest or claim whatsoever in respect of the Schedule Properties and our Client would be at liberty to proceed with the said transaction in connection with the Schedule Properties.

SCHEDULE

(Description of the Schedule Properties)

All that piece and parcel of immovable properties admeasuring 22 Acres 32 Guntas (excluding [illegible] Guntas of 'A' Kharab and 20.4 Guntas of 'B' Kharab) comprised in Survey Nos. 19/1 (Old No. 19), 6, 7, and 3/2, situated at [illegible] Village, Kasaba Hobli, Devanahalli Taluk, Bengaluru Rural District, more fully described in the table below.

Sl. No.	Survey Nos.	Acres	Guntas	Kharab	East by	West by	North by	South by
1	19/1 (Old No.19)	10	07	13.4	Chikkagarni Village Boundary	Survey No.10/3	Survey Nos.2, 3/1 and 3/2	NH Road
2	6	07	06	38	Survey Nos.3/2 and 4	Survey Nos.7 and 8	Survey No.18/2	Survey Nos. 19/2 and 7
3	7	03	17	39	Survey No.6	Survey No.9	Survey No.8	Survey No.19/2
4	3/2	01	19	30	Survey No.3/1	Survey No.6	Survey No.4	Survey Nos.19/1, 19/3 and 19/2

Sd/-
Mr. SRINIVAS B.R., Partner,
DSK Legal,
Prestige Loka, No. 201, 2nd Floor, No. 7/1 & 7/7,
Brunton Road, Bengaluru – 560025, Tel: 080-69548773

Date: 23.02.2026
Place: Bengaluru

Maharashtra State Agricultural Marketing Board (MSAMB)

Plot No. R-7, Market Yard, Gultekdi, Pune - 411037
Phone: 020-24528100 / 24528200
Website: www.msamb.com, Email: export@msamb.com

Request for Proposal (RFP)

MSAMB with support from MAGNET Project has developed Fruit and Vegetable Handling Facility at Baramati, Dist: Pune. Requesting for Proposal from competent agencies for the Selection of Agency to Operate, Maintain & Manage the said facility. The RFP document with detailed guidelines is available on the website http://mahatenders.gov.in. The last date for submission of the RFP is 10/03/2026. Amendments / modification / date extension to the RFP document will be uploaded on http://mahatenders.gov.in only.

Managing Director

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to notify the general public that our client intends to purchase all that piece and parcel of the immovable residentially converted property bearing Survey No.59/3 measuring 32 Guntas (Municipal Khatha No.[illegible], E.P.I.D No.[illegible]), Survey No.59/4 measuring 20 Guntas, including 4 Guntas of 'B' Kharab (Municipal Khatha No.[illegible], E.P.I.D No.[illegible]), both situated at [illegible] Village, [illegible] Hobli, [illegible] Taluk, Bengaluru Urban District, which are more fully described in the Schedule hereunder and hereinafter referred to as "Schedule Properties" from its rightful owners.

Any person having any right, claim, title, interest in the Schedule Properties or having any objection to the sale must notify the undersigned with documentary proof thereof within 21 days of this publication, failing which it shall be deemed that no person has any objection to our Client purchasing the Schedule Properties.

SCHEDULE

(description of the Schedule Properties)

All that piece and parcel of the immovable residentially converted property and the immovable commercially converted property, more fully described in the table set out hereunder bearing Survey No.59/3 measuring 32 Guntas (Municipal Khatha No.[illegible], E.P.I.D. No.[illegible]), Survey No.59/4 measuring 20 Guntas, including 4 Guntas of 'B' Kharab (Municipal Khatha No.[illegible], E.P.I.D. No.[illegible]), both situated at [illegible] Village, [illegible] Hobli, [illegible] Taluk, Bengaluru Urban District.

Sl. No.	Sy. No.	Extent Acres	Extent Guntas	Owners	East	West	North	South
1	59/3	0	32	Arun Prabhudas Meghani And Paresh Arun Meghani	Passage	Battery Road	Godrej Property	Remaining portion of Survey No.59/1
2	59/4	0	20	Arun Prabhudas Meghani and Paresh Arun Meghani	Passage	Battery Road	NDFF	Remaining portion of Survey No.59/1

Abhijit Atur
M/s Agrasa Legal,
3rd Floor, Srinivasa Krishna Mansion, Ashoka Pillar Road,
Jayanagar 2nd Block, Bengaluru-560011
Ph: (080) [illegible], Email: [illegible]

Date: 21.02.2026
Place: Bengaluru

National Highways Authority of India

(Ministry of Road Transport and Highways)

भर्ती सूचना / RECRUITMENT NOTICE

[illegible]

NHAI invites applications for the following position on contract basis to work with / assist the Conciliation Committee of Independent Experts (CCIE) at NHAI HQ, New Delhi:-

पद का नाम	पदों की संख्या*
संयुक्त सलाहकार (तकनीकी)- सीसीआईई Joint Advisor (Technical)- CCIE	02

[illegible]
*Number of posts may increase or decrease as per requirement of NHAI.

2. [illegible] www.nhai.gov.in [illegible]
Eligibility criteria and other conditions may be seen on NHAI's website www.nhai.gov.in.
3. [illegible] 24.03.2026 [illegible]
Submission of Applications: Application are to be submitted online only. Eligible candidates may apply online on the link provided on the website of NHAI by 24.03.2026 (upto 06:00 PM).
4. [illegible]
Corrigendum/Addendum/Cancellation to this advertisement, if any, shall be published on NHAI website only.

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Hon'ble Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways

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Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

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KEY BENEFITS:
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KEY BENEFITS:
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Shipminindia | Shipmin_india | Sagarmala Project | Sagarmala.gov.in / shipmin.gov.in

CLOSE WATCH
Keck Medicine of USC is testing whether dopamine-producing stem cells implanted in Parkinson's patients' brains can replace lost neurons, restore motor function, and potentially slow disease progression

QUICK QUIZ
Exactly 41 years ago, an American F-15 pilot fired a missile at an orbiting satellite 400km above, bringing it down, the first time an object in space was shot down by an airplane. What was the name of the pilot? Send answers to scienceofthetimes@timesofindia.com

C/2026 A1 (MAPS) may be visible during the day, if it survives brush with Sun

Stunning New Comet Swings By In April. It's On A Perilous Path

Jonti Horner

A newly discovered comet has astronomers excited, with the potential to be a spectacular sight in early April.

C/2026 A1 (MAPS) was spotted by four amateur astronomers with a remotely operated telescope in the Atacama desert on Jan 13. It quickly became apparent the comet was a member of a group called the Kreutz sungrazing comets, which include many of the brightest and most spectacular comets ever seen. MAPS is an acronym based on the last names of the astronomers who discovered it — Alain Maury, Georges Attard, Daniel Parrott and Florian Signoret.

The comet is diving towards a fiery date with our star. In early April it will pass within just 1,20,000km of the Sun's surface.

If MAPS survives, it could become a spectacular sight in the evening sky in early April. It may even become visible during the day as it swings closest to the Sun — unless it falls apart before then.

So what makes these sungrazers so exciting, and what can we expect?

FRAGMENTS OF A MEGA COMET

Over the past 2,000 years, a series of spectacular comets have graced our skies. They appear seemingly from nowhere, shining remarkably close to the Sun in the sky. Some even become bright enough to be seen in daytime.

Historically, the brightest comets often become known as "Great Comets". The Great Comet of 1965 — C/1965 S1 (Ikeya-Seki) — was the brightest comet of the 20th century. Discovered just one month before its closest approach to the Sun, it got as bright as the full Moon, easily visible with the naked eye during the day.

The Great Comet of 1882, C/1882 R1, was even more impressive. At its brightest, it was a hundred times brighter than the full Moon, dazzling in the sky for several months.

We now know that all these bright comets from the last two millennia — the Kreutz sungrazing family — share a common origin. At some point in the past (in the 3rd or 4th century BCE), a giant cometary nucleus, over 100km in diameter, came very close to the Sun. Some time after that, far from the Sun, that comet split into two major fragments and shed lots of smaller pieces.

Several hundred years later, in the 3rd century CE, those pieces returned as they journeyed on their long orbit around the Sun. Reports from 363 CE suggest there may even have been multiple comets visible with the naked eye in broad daylight at the same time. Those returning pieces again fragmented. In the 11th century, the two largest remaining pieces of the ancient mega comet swung by again, becoming the Great Comets of 1106 and 1138. Once again, the pieces fragmented — and the products of those fragmentations have been seen as a series of comets through the past two centuries.

WE'VE BEEN DUE FOR A BIG ONE

Today, the Kreutz family contains a vast number of smaller comets which fall apart en route towards the Sun, as well as larger pieces that can put on a fantastic show.

The most recent larger Kreutz sungrazer was visible in 2011. Discovered by astronomer Terry Lovejoy, the comet barely survived its close approach to the Sun, becoming as bright as Venus in late Dec 2011.

Predictions state we could see two large sungrazers in the coming decades, with one potentially arriving in the next couple of years. That comet would be a sibling to the Great Comets of 1965 and 1882, and a fragment of the Great Comet seen by Chinese observers in 1138.

ENTER COMET MAPS

C/2026 A1 (MAPS) already holds one record. At the time of its discovery, it was farther from the Sun than any previous sungrazer.

That suggests it might be a larger-than-usual fragment — perhaps.

The previous holder of this record was Ikeya-Seki in 1965, which proved to be the brightest of the 20th century. But technology has moved on in the past 70 years, and it seems very unlikely the nucleus of comet MAPS is as large as that of Ikeya-Seki. In turn, that makes it unlikely comet MAPS will be as bright.

Nevertheless, the fact we've caught it so early means it's either a reasonably large Kreutz fragment, or it's currently in outburst — already falling apart. Recent observations have shown it steadily brightening, which points to the former theory.

(Horner is professor, Astrophysics, at University of Southern Queensland. This article was first published in ***The Conversation****)*

HIGH-SPEED DEATH DIVERS: HERE'S WHAT MAKES 'SUNGRAZERS' RATHER SPECIAL

Kreutz sungrazers can come within 50,000 km of the Sun. They are a subgroup of regular sungrazers

By Feb, MAPS was near Mars. On April 4, it may skim the Sun, at a stunning 3 million km/h. If it survives the intense gravity and heat, MAPS may turn brighter than the full Moon

Best view of MAPS is from the southern hemisphere. Those in the north (India too) may see it before sunset. Even if it dies, telescopes may catch MAPS by late March

In Jan, MAPS was glowing turquoise from diatomic carbon emission

"If it survives, MAPS will be a spectacular thing to view. Its interaction with the Sun offers scientists a chance to know more about its composition etc — **R Srianand** | DIRECTOR, IUCAA

FIRST SEEN CENTURIES AGO

Sungrazer sightings date as far back as 371 BCE. **One seen by Aristotle, which cast shadows,** was likely a bright Kreutz sungrazer

Sungrazer Comet Lovejoy was a naked-eye comet for weeks in 2015. Some viewers in the global south described it as a searchlight

This painting by Lieve Verschuier is of the Great Comet of 1680 over Rotterdam, one of the brightest comets of the 17th century. It was a sungrazer, but not of the Kreutz family

King cobras may be riding trains, away from habitats

Anjali.Jhangiani
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When a king cobra turns up at places it should not be in, the explanation may not always be habitat loss or climate change. Sometimes, it could be the morning train.

Research by herpetologist Dikansh Parmar and team, titled 'Snakes on Trains: Railways May Sway Goa's King Cobra Distribution', published recently in the journal 'Biotropica', suggests India's vast railway network may be unintentionally ferrying the apex predator far beyond its usual habitats.

Using over two decades of rescue records in Goa, of the Western Ghats king cobra, a species endemic to the state, Parmar found that of the 47 locations from where the snake was rescued, five were completely unsuitable habitats, all within a few hundred metres of railway tracks and stations. One snake was found in the port city of Vasco, 120km away by train and far from the rainy forests it normally prefers. *(See map)*

Parmar, affiliated with the Leibniz Institute for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change (LIB) in Bonn, said he believes the snakes may be entering train compartments for shelter or prey. Rat-infested goods wagons make for particularly good hideouts, he added, because of prey availability.

This accidental transport of snakes via a rail network may sound unusual, but such incidents are likely underreported, Parmar said. "One indication of this is the increased reporting in recent years of snakes on trains on social media," he said.

The consequences of accidental relocation are not trivial. "Many snakes are highly adaptable, but king cobras have very specific habitat, prey and microclimatic needs, and being moved into unsuitable environments may significantly reduce chances of survival," said Parmar.

Snake rescuers in Goa told **TOI** a variety of snakes — not just king cobras — have been rescued from locations near railway tracks.

"We found a pit viper once, inside a scooter that was parked near a railway station," said Amrut Singh, from Animal Rescue Squad, in Bicholim.

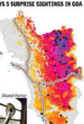
Benhail Antao, honorary wildlife warden of Goa forest department and host of 'Snakes SOS: Goa's Wildest' on NatGeo India, said unintentional movement of wildlife has been happening since the dawn of transport, "via trains, ships and trucks".

"We see it with reptiles, birds, frogs and lizards," Antao said, while recalling an incident in which a bamboo pit viper, which prefers the cool conditions of hilly forests, was found in humid Mapusa, most likely transported there by fruit trucks.

"This is also not unique to India. Blind snakes and worm snakes that live in soil and feed on termites have been found transported with potted plants to the UK," Antao said, adding that such relocation puts species and ecological balance at risk. "A king cobra in Vasco cannot survive for long," he said.

P Dennis Rödder, professor at LIB and co-author of the research with Parmar, said: "Artificial dispersal corridors created by human infrastructure may profoundly influence how species are reorganised across landscapes."

MAP SHOWS 5 SURPRISE SIGHTINGS IN GOA



Dikansh Parmar

A cobra in a moving train in Gujarat; blue dots show 5 spots near tracks where king cobras were found in Goa

"Passengers should avoid leaving leftovers on trains or throwing them on tracks as this attracts rodents, which in turn draw snakes. We hope Railways allows us to help create signage to promote awareness — **Dikansh Parmar** | HERPETOLOGIST AFFILIATED WITH LEIBNIZ INSTITUTE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF BIODIVERSITY CHANGE, BONN

LAST WEEK'S QUICK QUIZ **Question on Feb 15:** Name the Scottish engineer who, on Jan 26, 1926, publicly demonstrated the Televisor, proving for the first time that moving images could be transmitted & viewed remotely, laying the foundations for modern TVs. **Answer:** John Logie Baird

Mob lynches Dalit in J'khand, cops suspect 'love angle'

Daltonganj: A Dalit man (25) was allegedly lured to a village by a girl, tied to a cot, and beaten to death by a mob in Jharkhand's Palamu on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, reports **M F Ahmed**. One person has been detained.

Police got a call around midnight alleging that a youth was being beaten on suspicion of attempting to steal a tractor battery, said Parwa police station in-charge Anchit Kumar. A patrol team rushed to the spot, dispersed the mob, and took the victim, Pawan Kumar, to Medininai Medical College and Hospital in Daltonganj, where doctors declared him dead on arrival around 4 am.

Palamu SP Reeshma Rameshan described the allegation of theft as "unfounded" and a "deception" meant to mislead police. Investigators are probing a possible "love angle", as Kumar, a resident of nearby Kokarsa village, was allegedly lured to Telyahi village by a girl. Police suspect the girl's family is involved.

I feel secure and trust people here: Naulak

▸ Continued from P 1

"I have been here since my childhood. I feel somewhat secure. I trust the people here," Naulak told reporters.

Naulak's visit also carried an appeal beyond family. He came to press the case of thousands of internally displaced people, many marooned in relief camps with thinning aid and fading attention. He has filed a PIL, approached the SC and appeared before the Justice Mittal Committee. Now it is time for delivery, he said. "People are suffering. Those in relief camps, and those outside who receive even less support," he said, urging action from new state govt under CM Yumnam Khemchand Singh.

200 big cats poached in 20 yrs, central India hub, reveals RTI

MP Logs Most Cases, K'taka 3rd In Nat'l Tally

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Dehradun: As many as 200 big cats were poached across India between 2005 and Dec 2025, with central India emerging as a major hotspot, according to a Right to Information reply from Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) under the ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

The data showed that 59 of the total poaching cases occurred in central Indian habitats. Statewise figures shared by WCCB indicated that the highest number of tiger poaching cases were recorded in Madhya Pradesh (36), followed by Uttar Pradesh (14), Karnataka (13), Maharashtra (nine), Assam (six), Uttarakhand and Kerala (four each) and Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh (three each).

Wildlife experts linked the killings to international demand for body parts. Dr Y V Jhala, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) expert on big cats and former senior scientist and dean of Wildlife Institute of India, said, "These numbers are concerning since only a small portion of poached tigers and leopards are seized by authorities. Poaching remains lucrative despite stringent laws when there is a high-price market for parts and products of big cats. This demand continues to exist in neighbouring countries such as China and South East Asian nations."

Giving perspective to the data, Jhala added, "The data indicates seizures in these states, not the actual quantum of poaching, as stricter enforcement results in more recoveries.

"We need to evaluate seizure numbers in the context of tiger population trends and then infer the consequences of poaching. Field understanding shows that Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and North Eastern states are hotspots of poaching-driven declines of large cats."

India is home to around 3,600 tigers, accounting for nearly 75% of the global tiger population, as per the latest tiger estimation by ministry of environment, forest and climate change through Wildlife Institute of India and National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

The country has around 13,800 leopards across tiger range forests, according to another assessment. The RTI data showed that 92 leopards were poached during the same period.

As per WCCB records, the highest number of leopard poaching cases were registered in Himachal Pradesh, 21, followed by Andhra Pradesh, eight, Jammu and Kashmir, six, Punjab, five, Uttar Pradesh, five, Uttarakhand, five, Madhya Pradesh, five, and Tamil Nadu, five.

35% of leopard poaching cases occurred in the hill states of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand. Experts said this indicated a possible rise in human-wildlife conflict linked to fragmentation of forest stretches, encroached wildlife corridors and increasing vehicular and human movement near big cat habitats.

Wildlife experts emphasised relevance of patterns in poaching animal sanctuaries instead of focusing on quantum of material siezed

Hasten chargesheet filings to meet fiscal target, ED zonal offices told

New Delhi: At a high-level meeting of all senior-level officers of Enforcement Directorate in Guwahati last week, which was chaired by director Rahul Navin, all zonal offices were asked to expedite the filing of chargesheets so that the central agency can achieve its target of filing 500 prosecution complaints (chargesheets) in this financial year, which will come to a close in a little over a month's time.

Senior officials from other central agencies such as Narcotics Control Bureau, Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and from Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India were called to make presentations on the trends in financial crimes, cases of digital arrest, organised online frauds and cross-border anti-India activities.

As some officers highlighted non-cooperation from some state govts, ED director Rahul Navin asked his zonal heads to enhance use of intelligence platforms such as NATGRID and FINNET, have greater recourse to international cooperation mechanisms and make efforts to diversify case typologies in line with emerging risks.

The intent behind organising the high-level meet in J&K was to restore confidence in the security environment of the Union territory after the unfortunate terrorist attack at Pahalgam a few months earlier

Officers were advised to coordinate with Customs and other agencies concerned to detect illicit capital outflows disguised as legitimate trade transactions, to identify proceeds of crime related to predicate offences.

Guwahati was also chosen as the venue for ED's quarterly conference given the increasing anti-India activities from neighbouring Myanmar and Bangladesh.

In the last two to three years, the directorate has significantly expanded its footprint in the North-East, opening six new offices and establishing a presence in almost all states of the region, which has witnessed rising cases of cybercrime and drug trafficking.

In Sept last year, CBI conducted its quarterly conference in Srinagar. According to the officer, the intent behind organising the high-level meet there was "to restore confidence in the security environment of the Union territory after the unfortunate terrorist attack at Pahalgam a few months earlier". It was also done to demonstrate that J&K remains a safe, vibrant and forward-looking venue for national and international level deliberations, the officer added. TNN

1.2L new seats planned in 1k upgraded ITIs

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@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Around 1.2 lakh additional seats in courses on new-age emerging sectors are proposed to be added in the 1,000 industrial training institutes (ITIs) that are being upgraded under the newly launched PM SETU (Prime Minister's Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded ITIs).

These additional seats will cover over 50 new courses, which are slated to be introduced in the coming years, having special emphasis on emerging sectors such as AI, solar and renewables, semiconductors, electric vehicles, advanced manufacturing and automation among others, said sources.

"This additional capacity is expected to equip youth with job ready skills and make training more practical, industry aligned and closely linked to employment. This will be an important step towards expanding the scale of skill training for these new sectors," an official told **TOI**.

The proposal assumes significance as estimates show that there are about 2.3 million seats in nearly 15,000 ITIs across the country, with institutions often finding it difficult to fill them as students cite redundant courses, non-availability of instructors and inadequate infrastructure. Last year, the directorate general of training (DGT), which is the apex body under the skill ministry to develop vocational education de-affiliated nearly 4.5 lakh seats in nearly 6,000 ITIs.

Under the scheme, ITI clusters have been identified across 32 states and UTs, with 26 of them setting up a steering committee, indicating that governance and oversight mechanisms are being put in place.

"States are strengthening institutional frameworks and financial processes, while a few have already begun taking concrete steps to roll out the scheme on the ground," the official added.

Announced in Union Budget 2024-25, the PM SETU scheme with an outlay of Rs 60,000 crore aimed at upgrading 1,000 govt-run ITIs in a hub and spoke model with industry participation in the next five years. Of Rs 3,000 crore allotted in FY26, the skill ministry spent Rs 356 crore, although funding fiscal doubled to Rs 6,141 crore.

Maha IT intern drowns while taking selfie in TN

Nagpur: A 23-year-old IT intern from Maharashtra was swept out to sea and drowned at Chennai's Golden Beach while attempting to take a selfie on Saturday evening, reports **Soumitra Bose**. Another intern, also from Maharashtra, is reported missing.

Mayuri Chaudhari (23), from Bhandara district, had spoken to her mother around 4pm, just two hours before the incident. The other intern reported missing has been identified as Jay Patil from Jalgaon district.

"After earning her MTech degree from a college in Nanded, Mayuri was recently selected for an internship with IT major Cognizant in Chennai in February this year," said her father, Harishchandra.

Ferrari 'malfunctions', rams cars in Hyd; 5 hurt

Madhu.Rasala
@timesofindia.com

Hyderabad: A speeding Ferrari crashed into multiple vehicles, injuring five people, after its brake and steering developed a mechanical malfunction in Hyderabad's Jubilee Hills on Sunday morning.

Based on a complaint lodged by one of the victims, police arrested the car's owner, Kranthi Reddy, 30, a businessman who was behind the wheel at the time of the accident. Reddy was on his way to attend a wedding when the accident occurred. He and his wife were among those injured.

The Ferrari driver was booked under BNS section 281 for rash driving and for endangering human life. Preliminary investigation indicates a mechanical malfunction, said inspector Srinivasulu Reddy.

"Traffic movement in the area was severely affected following the accident," the inspector added.

A speeding Ferrari car collided head-on with three other vehicles on Road No 45 in Jubilee Hills on Sunday

Monday | February 23, 2026

Bennett & Coleman
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THE PATH TO EXCELLENCE

Advertorial, Education Promotional Feature

Drop in JEE Main perfect scores is not indicative of declining student performance

Top percentilers are calculated on a combination of statistical factors, scoring methodology and exam design, say academicians

Priyadarshini Gupta
@timesofindia.com

Over the past three years, participation in Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Main has remained consistently high. While over 11-12 lakh candidates appeared for Session 1 in 2024 and 2025, respectively, the 2026 edition saw participation of over 13 lakh candidates, marking an attendance rate of 96.26%. However, the number of candidates securing a perfect 100 percentile in JEE Main Session 1 has witnessed a decline over the past three years, dropping from 23 in 2024 to 14 in 2025 and to 12 in 2026.

A combination of statistical variation, scoring methodology, exam design, and evolving student choices may have led to the decline in the number of toppers, say academic experts. They say that one should not see it as evidence of falling student performance or a steeply rising exam difficulty. V Ramgopal Rao, group vice-chancellor, BITS Pilani Hyderabad and former director, IIT Delhi, says, "One possible factor behind fewer 100 percentilers could be improved discrimination among top performers, as recent JEE Main papers have become more concept-driven and less predictable. A few relatively tougher or time-consuming questions can widen score gaps among high achievers, preventing multiple candidates from converging at the exact maximum percentile."

A substantial portion of questions are now calculation-intensive, making it more difficult for students to attempt all questions accurately within the stipulated time

The fall in the number of 100 percentile scores from 23 to 12 over three years should not be overinterpreted, he says, adding, "When lakhs of students write an exam, a difference of 10 candidates at the absolute top is statistically small."

Concept-driven Format

Prof Rao adds that competition has not weakened, rather recent JEE Main papers appear more concept-driven and less pattern predictable. Even one or two tougher questions can widen the score spread among the top 50 candidates. Unlike earlier decades, when engineering and medicine dominated career aspirations, students today see more avenues of diverse career options across disciplines. Prof Rao says, "JEE is no longer a singular destination for every high achiever. There has been a gradual change in student aspirations, with some top performers increasingly exploring alternatives such as Olympiads, programmes at Indian Institute of Science (IISc), interdisciplinary courses, or overseas education."

The decline in the numbers could also be partly due to changes in the exam pattern. Rohit Gupta, chief academic officer, PhysicsWallah, says, "The overall paper length has increased, and a substantial proportion of questions are now calculation-intensive, making it more difficult for students to attempt all questions accurately within the stipulated time. As a result, achieving near-perfect scores has become more challenging, and top ranks are being captured by a narrower 'resamy layer' of candidates rather than a larger cluster reaching the maximum percentile." He, however, adds that fewer 100 percentilers do not indicate weaker performance but rather reflect deeper engagement required per question.

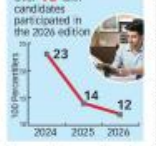
Minor calibration differences across shifts could also influence how many candidates mathematically reach the 100 percentile mark in a given year. A professor from NIT Rourkela, on the condition of anonymity, says, "The year-to-year fluctuations may primarily stem from the percentile calculation system itself. Since JEE Main is conducted in multiple shifts and the NTA calculates percentiles separately for each shift rather than normalising raw scores across all sessions, there is typically at least one topper per shift. The final number of 100 percentilers depends on how many candidates achieve identical highest scores within their respective sessions."

Image generated by AI

Number Crunching

11-12 lakh candidates appeared for Session 1 in 2024 and 2025, respectively

Over **13** lakh candidates participated in the 2026 edition



IIT semester exchanges set to redefine students' career trajectory without violating JEE rank system

Rajlakshmi Ghosh
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IITs will soon allow students to cross campuses for a semester and help them earn credits while being away from the home institute. The recent move is expected to enable students to move between the institutes and pursue their preferred programme aligned with their career aspirations. This will give more flexibility to the students who have so far been defined by the JEE rank-based system which decides not just their admissions but also career paths.

Once the initiative gains ground, the IITs are likely to become more interconnected, collaborative, and agile. Highlighting the key outcomes, Prof Suman Chakraborty, director, IIT Kanpur, says, "Students today operate in a world of interdisciplinary careers, hybrid technologies, and rapid innovation cycles. With greater student mobility, geographical barriers will be removed. So, if a student at IIT Kharagpur wants exposure to advanced semiconductor fabrication facilities at IIT Bombay, quantum labs at IIT Madras, or policy-tech interfaces at IIT Delhi, the system should enable, not restrict, that aspiration."

On whether a single semester can make an impact, Prof Chakraborty says, it can redefine career choices. "Globally, semester exchanges shape research directions, startup ideas, PhD trajectories, and lifelong collaborations. Students will be able to earn core or elective academic credits in addition to credits for lab work, research projects, innovation/startup immersion and emerging technology modules (AI, quantum, climate-tech, semiconductors, etc). Recruiters and global universities value exposure to diversity. A transcript that shows cross-IIT academic mobility signals intellectual curiosity and greater adaptability," he adds.

Image generated by AI

In the earlier rigid structure, a student admitted to Civil Engineering at one IIT had limited flexibility to access cutting-edge AI labs in another IIT

"In principle, a semester, together with vacation breaks on either side, can extend to nearly eight months. That is a substantial period to adapt to new environments, understand fresh academic expectations, and undertake a meaningful project," says Prof Prathap Haridoss, Dean (Academic Courses), IIT Madras, underscoring the initiative's relevance amid the growing emphasis on activities such as long-term and research internships, and students' holistic development. "To facilitate greater student mobility without compromising core academic requirements, this initiative serves as an important enabling tool," he adds.

Credit Transfer

Even though in the past IIT students have collaborated informally, this is the first time that the IIT Council has taken a policy-level decision to develop a credit-transfer mechanism. "Earlier, students could collaborate on projects or attend short-term programmes, but there was no formal credit-bearing, senate-approved, system-wide exchange structure. In the earlier rigid structure, a student admitted to Civil Engineering at one IIT had limited flexibility to access cutting-edge AI labs in another IIT. Students' options were often constrained by seat allocation algorithms. While the rank remains a fair admission filter, post the initiative's implementation, a Mechanical Engineering student from IIT Madras may spend a semester at IIT Tirupati working on EV systems; a physics student from IIT Delhi could join a quantum materials lab at IIT Kanpur," Prof Chakraborty says.

"Since the students will receive their degrees from the IIT to which they were admitted, there will be no rank violation. So far, inter-IIT exchanges have taken place on a limited, case-by-case basis. The present initiative seeks to institutionalise and widen access to such opportunities for students. In principle, the initiative is of interest to all the IITs, operationally, however, each IIT's senate will need to examine the specifics and grant approval once satisfied," says Prof Haridoss.

Course Mapping

Curricula mapping across multiple programmes in the various IITs will be a key requirement to execute the plan. "The curricula in corresponding disciplines are broadly comparable across the IITs, although the specifics may be different. Typically, each student at an IIT has a faculty advisor, who can help them with the suitable mapping of courses when they go on a semester exchange," Prof Haridoss explains.

Efforts are being made to identify clusters such as—AI & Data Sciences, Semiconductor & Electronics, Climate & Sustainability, Biomedical Engineering & Med-Tech, Quantum Technologies and Advanced Manufacturing. There is also a possibility for non-IITs to gain mileage. "Non IITs, especially NITs, are already in a position to apply for a semester exchange to IIT Madras and can upgrade to a PhD programme at the Institute," Prof Haridoss adds.

UPSC restricts serving officers from reattempting CSE to create opportunities, stop vacancy holding

Sonal Srivastava
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The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) issued a notification in February, limiting reattempts in the UPSC CSE for candidates who have already been allocated to services. The move is likely to result in fairer competition and create opportunities for fresh candidates. The mandate has been welcomed by experts, who caution that aspirants must be doubly sure of their preparation before attempting the exam.

According to the notification, a candidate who is appointed to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) based on the results of an earlier examination and continues to be a member of that service is barred from appearing in the Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2026. Furthermore, a candidate who has been selected or appointed to the Indian Police Service (IPS) based on the results of the earlier examination shall not be eligible to opt for or be allocated to IPS based on the result of CSE 2026.

The UPSC's move is meant to streamline recruitment processes by making civil service appointments fairer and more broad-based. "Government spends a substantial amount of money on training officers for public services. When a serving officer reappears and gets selected for another service, the public expenditure incurred on the training is wasted, as the officer must undergo fresh training. Serving officers preparing for the next attempt tend to pay less attention to the work allotted as an officer; instead of focusing on excelling in their training and assignments, they set their sights on the next attempt, starting again with the prelims and going through the entire cycle. When such restrictions are in place, it ensures that those already selected remain focused on the responsibilities in hand rather than being distracted by another attempt," says Pranay Aggarwal, director, (Academics) IAS Gurukul.

Until now, several officers — including those in the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) and other Group A services — have been reappearing for the examination in hopes of securing the IAS, IFS, or IPS. "According to estimates, nearly 40-50 candidates in recent rank lists have been serving officers attempting to upgrade their service allocation. This has led to reduced opportunities for fresh candidates; the reform is expected to expand the pool of vacancies available to first-time aspirants," says Jobin S Kottaram, founder and chairman, Absolute IAS Academy.

"The reform places greater responsibility on candidates to make informed decisions at the outset. Once a candidate joins a service, opportunities to 'improve' allocation through repeated attempts will be limited," adds Kottaram.

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Don't we all know why nerds do what they do? To get money, which leads to popularity, which leads to girls

– ZADIE SMITH

The Silicon Club

Pax Silica opens gates to big investment in India, even as the tech Cold War heats up

Now that India has joined Pax Silica, anxiety over being left out in Dec should be buried, and attention should turn to making the most of this US-led alliance. What is Pax Silica? Literally, it means 'silicon peace', silicon being a by-word for computing technologies. But this 'peace' does not exist. It's a long-term goal. What we're living through is a tech Cold War whose fallout we experienced twice last year, in April and Oct. Both times, China curbed exports of rare-earths and magnets made from them, hurting other countries' industries. With 90% of world's rare earth production, China can inflict this punishment on anyone, anytime. Hence, the need for a rival alliance that can secure supplies of minerals, semiconductors, energy, and human talent. Or, as US puts it: "Reduce coercive dependencies."

And given the fresh round of uncertainties set off by the US Supreme Court's tariff rebuke to Trump, it is important to note that Pax Silica is not a tariff-focussed pact as traditional trade agreements are. This is about backstopping technological leadership with supply-chain control. That's why US started the alliance with a handful of countries like Japan, S Korea and Australia that are strong in semiconductors and critical minerals. Plus Netherlands, which has a monopoly on machines that make advanced chips.

But India has its place too. At Friday's signing, US ambassador Sergio Gor mentioned "deep talent…engineering depth…critical minerals processing capacity," all key to AI development. And AI is what this tussle is all about. It's believed to be the most transformative technology ever, so both US and China want to establish their supremacy in it. India usually doesn't take sides, but sitting on the fence won't get us those multi-billion-dollar data centres, new submarine cables and chip-making factories that investors promised at the just-concluded AI Impact Summit. India's entry into Pax Silica makes it easier for other partner nations to invest in it as part of their China+ strategy. Nobody expects this to erase China's lead in, say, critical minerals, but if 20-30% of processing capacity comes up outside, it won't be able to bully and disrupt supply chains. Therefore, peace – Pax Silica.

Politics Of America's Tariffs

US consumers won't benefit post-SC ruling. So, Republicans are still in trouble. Biggest point is that US apex court has become too powerful because lawmakers have abdicated their role

Dan Cassino

Professor of Govt & Politics

Democrats spent the weekend celebrating the US Supreme Court ruling against Trump's tariffs, which declared most of his taxes on imported goods as illegal. Those celebrations are premature. It's not just that Trump immediately started to bring the tariffs back by other means. But also, the politics of tariffs are more complicated than Democrats want to pretend. And the real winner here isn't Republicans, Democrats or everyday Americans, but only the Supreme Court itself.

- Part of Trump's electoral success has come from adopting Democratic policies on some issues, and tariffs are one of them. Democrats have traditionally been the party favouring this means to protect unionised American workers from unfair competition. Leaders in the party's progressive wing, like Bernie Sanders, have long pushed for higher tariffs on China and other major exporters to US.

Remember that Biden didn't roll back most of the tariffs Trump had put into place during his first term – because Democrats like some of these tariffs, even if they won't admit that Trump has done anything positive.

- Politically, the tariffs have put Republicans in a sticky bind. They're reticent to push back against Trump but their allies in business and finance see the tariffs, correctly, as putting a damper on the global flow of capital that pays their bills. Republicans tolerate the tariffs because they don't want to antagonise Trump, but they'd actually love it if these disappeared.

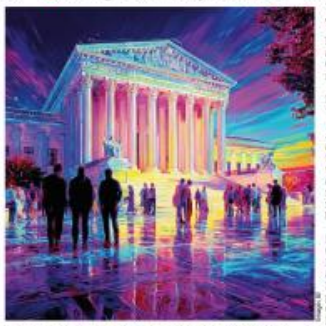
They also don't want to be seen as raising taxes, leading to the ridiculous talking point among Trump and other Republicans that tariffs don't raise prices. The tariffs were a big part of how Republicans sold the huge tax breaks passed last year at Trump's behest. They said lost tax revenue would be made up by money coming in from the tariffs.

- Even as the loss isn't much of a victory for Democrats, or a loss for Republicans, it also isn't a victory for consumers, who aren't going to see prices come down.

US law contains all kinds of provisions that allow the president to put tariffs into place, though not in the reckless way Trump has been using the law, and which the Court has ruled against. It was with one of these that Trump instituted a new tariff immediately after the Court ruling.

However, most of these provisions require a finding from a govt agency. And while no one thinks Trump will have trouble getting agencies to tell him what he wants to hear, the days of him slapping a tariff on Switzerland because he didn't like something the Swiss leader said to him on the phone, are over.

- The ruling would be a victory for consumers if importers get a refund on the tariffs that they have already paid, but they won't.



Does the administration one these refunds? That's what Democratic presidential hopefuls have pounced on. Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, one of the frontrunners for the nomination in 2028, has sent Trump an invoice for every household in his state. "Trump stole $1,700 from your family and won't give it back," is being hailed as a winning message for the midterm elections. Of course, no one is going to get a refund, except maybe companies who pursue cases in court.

- While the message demanding money back from Trump might help in the midterms, it's his rants against the Supreme Court that are the tariff debacle's biggest political gift for the Democrats. Trump declared that several Republican appointees to the Court are disloyal, corrupt, and even that they are being influenced by foreign govts.

He went so far as to echo the talking points of the Democratic Party's left wing, which has long held that the Court needs to be expanded to cut down the influence of any particular member, and that Justices should have term limits.

The next Democratic president, whoever it is, will have to deal with a Supreme Court skeptical of a liberal agenda, and be willing to risk hypocrisy to rein the Court in. In this, the fact that Trump just made Court reform a bipartisan issue would only help.

- But while Trump's tirades might help the liberal cause of Court reform, the 6-3 EEPA ruling itself is smart, politically for the Supreme Court.

The Court exists in an ambiguous position in American govt, as nothing in the Constitution actually gives it the power it has long claimed to declare laws or presidential actions to be unconstitutional. It only has that power so long as other branches agree to abide by its rulings, raising the spectre that unpopular or inconvenient rulings could just be ignored, as they have been by presidents in the past.

The only way the Court holds on to power is to seem like it's apolitical, so a rare conservative ruling that goes against Trump helps build legitimacy among Democrats. That's important because we're expecting another ruling that will further gut the Voting Rights Act and allow states to dilute the voting power of Black Americans in southern states. Giving Democrats something they want first, will help to cushion that blow, and make them think they can work with the current Court, rather than pursuing politically perilous reform plans.

The truth of the matter is that the US Supreme Court is now the too powerful today, largely because Congress has basically given up on passing laws, shifting influence from where it's supposed to be over to the executive and judicial branches. Reform of some kind is needed, but by giving a symbolic victory to Democrats, the Court may have bought itself enough goodwill to delay the reforms that would put it back in its rightful place.

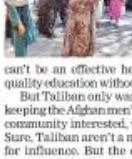
The writer teaches at Fairleigh Dickinson University, US

Dark Age Returns

Taliban's new penal code re-imposes total gender apartheid on Afghan women

To the international community's utter indifference, Taliban have created a horror chamber for Afghan women. In the latest – after barring women from school & work, restricting their movement and access to health, erasing women from public life – Kabul issued a new penal code with medieval provisions. The new code enshrines gender apartheid where women are treated like property and their husbands and male relatives are allowed to physically punish them, "provided this doesn't cause broken bones or open wounds".

This shows Taliban 2.0 are as brutish as their earlier avatar. At the same time, they are also trying to attract foreign investments. Decades of war have ravaged Afghan economy. True, Afghan economy grew by 4.3% last year. But this was a temporary boost due to 2mn returning refugees from Pakistan and Iran. Taliban know they are vulnerable to internal pressures sans long-term economic growth. Hence their attempt to promote tourism by inviting YouTubers to Afghanistan. But there's no way a vibrant tourism industry can be built without women. Just like there can't be an effective healthcare sector without women doctors, or quality education without girls and women teachers.



But Taliban only want to show minimal signs of flexibility – like keeping the Afghan men's cricket team going – to keep the international community interested, while sticking to their obscurantist ideology. Sure, Taliban aren't a monolith. There are different factions vying for influence. But the core leadership headed by supreme leader Mullah Akhundzada has stamped its regressive views on Taliban govt. The strategy of treating women as sub-human while showing some signs of economic openness to foreigners won't work. There cannot be any progress without women. Saudi Arabia under MBS has come to this realisation, making changes to its guardianship laws and boosting women's economic participation. But it will take decades to fully dismantle discriminatory patriarchal structures. For, even in liberal democracies the fight to shatter glass ceilings for women continues. Taliban, by sanctioning mistreatment of Afghan women, are again taking Afghanistan to a dark place.

GOI Has A Math Problem To Solve

India's tech ambitions require thousands of chips that cost $40k each, annual electricity bill of around ₹800cr for just one setup. If govt is to help, it must put more money in & require agencies to spend it efficiently

Arindam Goswami

Nvidia has announced several new partnerships with Indian companies to help grow the country's AI infra. The announcements, made at the India AI Impact Summit, cover cloud computing, payment systems, data centres, and startup funding. These moves put the American chipmaker at the centre of India's efforts to build its own AI capabilities through govt's IndiaAI Mission.

The India AI Impact Summit felt like a gold rush, and India seems to be at the centre of it. But behind all the press releases and handshakes is a number that often gets overlooked: ₹1,000cr. That's the amount GOI set aside for its AI mission in this year's Union Budget – about $331mn. Understanding the significance of this figure is key to knowing whether India's AI goals are realistic or just wishful thinking.

Let's look at the numbers. One Nvidia H100 GPU, which is essential for modern AI, costs about $30,000 to $40,000. Govt's entire AI budget for FY27 could buy only 3,000 to 4,000 of these chips. Meanwhile, Yotta Data Services plans to set up 900 megawatts of AI computing power in 2028, using tens of thousands of advanced chips. This means govt's yearly AI budget can't even cover a small part of what one private Indian company is doing in a year. For context, the US CHIPS Act provided $52bn in public funding, and EU supported its AI plans with a €1bn initiative.

What's even more surprising is that out of the meagre ₹2,000cr set aside for FY26, only about ₹990cr was actually used – a 40% utilisation rate. Instead of fixing how the money is spent, GOI just cut the budget in half. At the same time, India's AI startups and researchers, unable to get affordable govt computing resources, kept using AWS, Azure, and Google Cloud. This sent money back to foreign companies.

A data centre with tens of thousands of H100 GPUs will require multiple megawatts of power nonstop. In Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, where most data centres are being built, industrial electricity costs between ₹7 and ₹9 per unit. Running a 100-megawatt AI facility will cost ₹800cr to ₹900cr a year just for electricity. That's almost the same as govt's entire AI budget. The private sector gets this – Reliance's planned 3-gigawatt facility in Jamnagar will use renewable energy, which is a smart move. India's power grid has around 500 gigawatts of capacity, with renewables making up 26%. But the key issue is reliability – AI data centres need power all the time.

This gap in reliable power is the real infra challenge.

Union Budget's most creative solution is a tax holiday for foreign cloud providers who build data centres in India, lasting until 2047. Building a large data centre costs $3bn to $5bn. A 20-year tax exemption at India's 25% rate means giving up about $30mn in tax each year, but it could bring in over a billion dollars in infra that govt couldn't afford on its own.

But there's a problem. If a foreign company builds a data centre for a foreign cloud provider, Indian users will pay international prices for access. IndiaAI Mission, on the other hand, promises affordable GPU access for local startups and researchers. Without rules attached to the tax holiday, India could end up with top-notch AI infra that its own innovators can't afford to use.

There are four ways to fix this. First, improve how funds are used before increasing the budget. Set up a public, monthly dashboard that shows exactly how IndiaAI Mission's money is spent, which entity becomes owner of govt computing, and where disbursements are delayed. Link ministerial performance reviews to how quickly funds are deployed, not just to announcements. The dashboard could be under an independent body like NITI Aayog.

Tie a portion of the Mission's annual budget renewal to demonstrated utilisation.

Second, any data centre operator getting the tax holiday should have to reserve a set percentage of GPU capacity for IndiaAI Mission access at lower rates. Data centre operators will push back hard, arguing that reserved capacity at discounted rates undermines their unit economics. Govt could counter this by making the reserved-capacity obligation tiered – starting at 10% in year one and scaling up as the operator's capacity grows – and by allowing operators to count the discounted access against their tax liability.

Third, shift the focus from computing to power. Instead of spending ₹1,000cr on GPUs, use some of that to support dedicated renewable power lines to AI data centre clusters in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. Designate two or three AI infra zones where central and state govts jointly fast-track dedicated green power corridors, offering states a share of the upside.

Finally, govt should create a tiered AI infra PLI scheme that rewards private data centre operators not just for building capacity, but for how much of it is actually used by Indian startups, universities, and public institutions at lower prices. Operators who support local AI builders should get higher PLI payouts.

Last week's AI summit was truly exciting. GOI just needs to do a better job of putting its plans into action.

The writer is with the High-Tech Geopolitics Programme, Takshashila Institution

And Then There Were None

Case of the vanishing little grey cells

Chethan.Kumar@timesofindia.com

Hercule Poirot, one imagines, would have been appalled. Not by any murder – that was his metier – but by what is happening to the "little grey cells" of humanity in this age of the endless scroll. Consider his method: meticulous observation, unrivalled concentration, patient assembly of facts into pattern. Now picture him consulting ChatGPT mid-investigation. *Mon Dieu*, he would exclaim, twirling his magnificent moustaches in horror. "This is not detection. This is laziness of the most criminal kind!"

Yet here we are, Baby Boomers and Gen Z alike, committing precisely this crime against our own cognition. Swipe, tap, algorithmic reel, each a tiny theft from the brain's capacity to think.

Neurologists in Bengaluru now report that grandparents and grandchildren present with eerily similar symptoms: memory lapses, scattered attention, diminished learning ability. Different perpetrators, same victim: human thought itself. This could be true in other big cities, even our towns.

Our little grey cells, just as Poirot's did, require exercise. Poirot never delegated his thinking to others. Certainly not to some AI that could serve up answers faster than Mrs Oliver could devour apples. The effort of reasoning, of holding multiple threads in mind, of remembering – this was the work that kept his brain formidable well into old age.

Today's young people, neurologists observe, search Google before the question has fully formed in their minds. An hour later, half the answer has evaporated. Their elders, meanwhile, having retired from mental exertion as thoroughly as from their professions, scroll through feeds and message threads, never pausing long enough to truly engage. Both groups are outsourcing cognition to their phones.

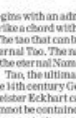
The brain, it seems, is very much like Poirot himself: it does not appreciate being made redundant. When we no longer ask it to work – to spell, to calculate, to remember a friend's birthday without calendar alerts – it begins, quietly, to withdraw its services. Not through damage, doctors clarify, but through disuse. Architecture remains sound – function atrophies.

Poirot would have prescribed his usual cure: method and discipline. Put down the phone. Read a book – a proper one, not scrolling text. Engage the grey cells with crosswords, with conversation requiring more than abbreviations, with questions that demand we think rather than tap.

The solution is unglamorous but elementary. To solve the mystery of our disappearing cognitive abilities, we need only examine the method of the crime: we have, all of us, become accomplices in our own mental diminishment. As Poirot might say: "It is simple, but not easy, *mon ami*."

Calvin & Hobbes

Sacred*space*



The philosophic outlook rises above all sectarian controversy. It finds its own position not only by appreciating and synthesising what is solidly based in the rival sects but also by capping them all with the keystone of non-duality.

Paul Brunton

When Worshipped And Worshipper Are One

Jug Suraiya

The state of enlightenment that sages attain is that of ultimate tranquillity. But as many accounts attest, the ascent to the transcendence called Moksh, or Satori, or best of all that which remains without name or definition, can be an earth-shattering experience, as electrifying as a thunderbolt striking not from the blue but from within.

One of the most harrowing of such narrations is that of Ramkrishna Paramhans, a mystic whose polestar of guidance in his quest for liberation was the Goddess Kali, although he was a disciple of Adi Shankracharya's Advaita, the teaching that the individual atman is non-different (a-dvaita) from the cosmic reality symbolised by Brahma.

The liberation from the labyrinthine illusion of separateness lies in the path of jnan, knowledge, which embodies all routes of spiritual realisation without the barriers or boundaries of distinction and discrimination.

The Introduction to The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna, translated from Bengali into English in 1943 by Swami Nikhilananda, describes the sage's release from the bondage of sensory limitation in devastating detail:

"I had no difficulty in taking my mind from all the objects of the world. But the radiant, undull to familiar figure of the Blissful Mother…appeared before me as a living reality…prevented me from passing into the Great Beyond. Again and again I tried, but She stood in my way every time…

"…I again sat to meditate. As soon as the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword, and with it clove Her in two. The last barrier fell…I lost myself in samadhi."

By what Nietzsche called dancing at the perilous edge of the abyss of self-negation, Ramakrishna cut the bonds of attachment, however sublime, that create the illusion of discrimination, of separateness, from the inescapable unity of all being.

In doing this he went beyond even the core of Advaita as summed up in the Upanishadic Great Saying, 'Tat Twam Asi', 'That Thou Art, Tat being Brahma, Twam the individual soul, and Asi establishing correlation between the two. The phrase is a mnemonic connecting the individual with Brahma.

THE SPEAKING TREE

The verbal linkage between the two, like Ramakrishna's vision of Kali, creates the snare of the sensory world to act as go-between, an interloper in the inseparable.

The Tao Te Ching, credited to the fabled Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, begins with an admonition that would strike a chord with Ramakrishna: "The tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao. The name can be named is the eternal Name."

Tao, the ultimate reality, or what the 14th century German mystic Meister Eckhart called the Godhead, cannot be contained in any verbal representation, any imagined concept or destination, be it Kali or any other manifestation whatsoever.

The true devotee formed under from the devoted by annihilating the separation between worshipper and worshipped in all-embracing Brahmn.

As the poet put it: "They reckon ill who leave me out / When me they fly, I am the wings. / I am the doubter and the doubt / And I the hymn the Brahmin sings / Find me…and turn thy back on Heaven."

Beyond the sacred there are no destinations. Not even that mofussil way-station called Heaven.

Cyber threats dominate risk landscape today

Organisations are facing sustained disruption from risks converging across technology, markets, regulation, geopolitics and the workforce, rather than emerging in isolation. Increasingly, shocks in one area spill over into others, amplifying impact on businesses

Source: FICCI-EY Risk Survey 2026

Punjab & Sind Bank
7.40%
666 DAYS FD
Offer for Limited Period
(For Super Senior Citizen)

IBM opens AI GovTech facility in Lucknow

Times News Network

Bengaluru: IBM has launched its AI GovTech Innovation Center in Lucknow to position AI as core infrastructure for modern governance with measurable public impact.

As governments worldwide grapple with rising citizen expectations, growing regulatory complexity and exponential data growth, AI is becoming mission-critical to public sector performance. The centre will function as a collaborative platform to design, validate and scale trusted AI solutions that improve productivity, transparency and service delivery. IBM currently employs 300 people at its Lucknow campus and plans to scale the workforce to 2,000 with the launch of the new centre. The centre was inaugurated by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath in the presence of IBM chairman and CEO Arvind Krishna, IBM India & South Asia MD Sandip Patel, IIT Kanpur director Prof Manindra Agrawal, and other state and IBM officials.

"AI will define the next era of government effectiveness and economic competitiveness. Around the world, and especially in India, we are seeing governments move decisively from exploration to execution. It is encouraging to see this level of openness to responsible AI adoption," Krishna said. "The Lucknow center brings together IBM's global AI leadership and a strong local talent ecosystem, with proximity to leading engineering and academic institutions. Together, this enables us to translate AI ambition into measurable public impact," he added. IBM's Lucknow campus also houses a Software Lab contributing to the company's global software portfolio.

Inconsistent Policies In US Seen As **'New Normal'** | Companies Fear Buyers May Seek Discount Review

Tariff tantrums: Exporters brace for uncertain times

Sidhartha@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: A leading exporter left work on Friday with additional US tariffs on most goods from India at 25%. He was hoping it will fall to 18% this week. Late evening, the US Supreme Court declared the imposition of 'reciprocal tariffs' illegal and by Saturday a new levy of 10% kicked in, which moved to 15% by evening.

"Indian exporters were on tenterhooks for the last three quarters as we were offering very heavy discounts to retain US business. We knew our govt was working on a bilateral trade deal. The US economy's resilience is the only help that mitigated these effects, but one thing is very clear, that inconsistency in US tariff policies is new normal for now," said Pallab Banerjee, MD of Pearl Global, a leading garment maker.

Over the last 10 months, they have seen multiple changes and most businesses are bracing for more twists and turns as the current tariffs are in place for 150 days.

Most exporters are happy with uniform tariffs over the MFN or product specific rate and having dealt with discounts of as much as 15-18% when Trump had slapped 50% levy on India, discounts are something that they are willing to live with.

Against discounts of 15-18% when the punitive tariffs of 50% were in place for Indian exports, the discounts had dropped to 0-3% after the trade deal was announced on Feb 2. Now, many exporters fear that US buyers will seek a three-way split, which means a discount of up to 5%.

"The 10% tariffs were good, we were all smiling, but then it changed within a few hours. This is temporary. We will get to know what happens when offices open (in the US on Monday)," said Jyoti Apparels MD HKL Magu, an industry veteran.

"The frequent tariff changes impact businesses, particularly retailers and brands, who will continuously need to recalibrate their cost calculations and negotiate or renegotiate with suppliers," said Banerjee. Footwear industry players believe level-playing field is good for Indian businesses. "It is good. Coming from a higher duty to lower will not make much difference," said Israr Ahmed, director at Farida Group, a large leather and footwear exporter.

"Recent clarity provided by the US Supreme Court ruling has improved visibility for global footwear and leather sourcing, with effective duties now expected to fall in the 10-15% range, a more favourable outcome than earlier. The ruling applies uniformly across Asian sourcing countries, helping restore predictability for US brands," added Florence Shoe Company chairman Aqeel Panaruna.

The elephant in the room is China, which is a major gainer from the fallout of the US Supreme Court ruling. Against additional tariffs of well over 30% on most products, it will pay less than half the rate and tariff-wise, be at par with competitors.

TWISTS & TURNS

Period	Tariff Applied	Conditions
Before April 2, 2025	MFN tariff only	No reciprocal tariffs
April 2 – Aug 6	MFN + 10%	Initial reciprocal tariff
Aug 7 – Aug 26	MFN + 25%	Reciprocal tariff increased
Aug 27 2025 – Feb 6 2026	MFN + 50%	25% reciprocal tariff + 25% tariff due to Russian oil buy
Feb 7 – Feb 24	MFN + 25%	Russian oil-related penalty tariff removed
Not implemented	MFN + 18%	Proposed reduction under trade deal
Feb 20*	MFN + 10%	Trump levies new tariffs on all nations, revises to 15%
Feb 24	MFN + 15%	Section 122 tariffs for 150 days

* Announced Feb 20, was to be effective Feb 24; MFN is product specific tariff applied to all countries

IDFC First reports ₹590cr fraud in Haryana govt a/c

Mumbai: IDFC First Bank has reported a Rs 590-crore discrepancy in deposits held on behalf of Haryana govt at its Chandigarh branch, and suspended four employees pending investigation.

The bank's filing comes after the state directed its departments to close accounts with private lenders on Feb 18. The matter was escalated to the bank's board at a hastily convened meeting on Feb 21, after the lender filed a police complaint and notified regulators. It has also informed its statutory auditors and initiated the process of appointing an independent external agency to conduct a forensic audit. In addition, recall requests have been sent to certain beneficiary banks to lien-mark balances in suspicious accounts.

The disclosure was made to the exchanges has been uploaded on the bank's website. Meanwhile, Haryana's finance department has de-empanelled IDFC First Bank and AU Small Finance Bank for all state business with immediate effect, barring any parking or transaction of govt funds through them. On Feb 18, 2026, it also tightened

4 SUSPENDED

rules on handling public funds. Departments can now open scheme accounts only in nationalised banks in the state, while accounts in private or corporate banks will need prior finance department approval.

Based on a preliminary internal assessment, the bank said the issue is confined to a group of Haryana govt-linked accounts operated through the Chandigarh branch and does not extend to other customers at the branch. The aggregate amount under reconciliation across the identified accounts is about Rs 590 crore.

Traders take stock, expect mkt mood swings

Mumbai: Markets are expected to remain volatile during the week as clarity among Dalal Street investors about the US tariffs on goods exported to the world's largest economy continues to remain elusive. While most market players feel that the rate of tariff on Indian goods will not be much different from what it was earlier, some feel that the new tariff structure will put India at the same level with several other competing countries, a favourable situation than what it was before the US Supreme Court invalidated President Donald Trump's tariffs on Friday evening.

According to Nilesh Shah, MD, Kotak Mahindra Mutual Fund, the street's expectation is that the US will use various provisions of law to keep tariffs almost unchanged. "Any change will be for the short term and hence unlikely to impact market direction materially," Shah said late on Saturday. TNN

TOI IN THE CLASSROOM

Paying Tax On Your Gold Or Silver Mutual Funds

Investors have poured record sums into gold and silver funds, with their ETFs garnering ₹33,503 crore in Jan. As investors transact in these funds amid high volatility, we look at the tax implications on precious metal funds

Invesco Mutual Fund
An investor education and awareness initiative
For Know Your Customer (KYC) guidelines along with the documentary requirements and procedure for change of address, phone number, bank details, etc., please visit the Education and Guidance section on www.invescomutualfund.com. Investor should deal with only SEBI registered Mutual Funds, details of which can be verified under "Intermediaries/Market Infrastructure Institutions" on https://www.sebi.gov.in/index.html. For any grievance / complaint, please call us on 1800-209-0007 or write to us at mfservices@invescoindia.com. Alternatively, complaints can be registered on the SEBI SCORES Portal at https://scores.sebi.gov.in
Mutual Fund investments are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.

How Are Gains In Precious Metal ETFs Taxed?

Investors holding gold or silver ETFs for more than one year pay 12.5% long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax; those holding for less than one year pay 20% short-term capital gains (STCG) tax. For gold or silver funds of funds, the holding period for 12.5% LTCG is two years or more; if sold before two years, gains are taxed as per the investor's income-tax slab.

Can These Funds Get LTCG Tax Exemption?

No. Long-term capital gains tax benefits of up to ₹1.25 lakh per annum are available only for equity-related instruments. Gold and silver funds are not eligible for this exemption.

Can Losses Within 1 Yr Of Holding Be Set Off?

Yes. If an investor sells gold or silver ETFs or a fund of funds within one year and incurs a short-term capital loss (STCL), the loss can be set off against short-term or long-term gains from stocks, other ETFs, or equity-oriented mutual funds.

Taxes On Gold, Silver ETFs Traded Intraday

Many investors traded in gold and silver ETFs on the same day amid sharp price swings. Profits from such transactions are treated as speculative business income. These are added to your total annual income and taxed as per your applicable income-tax slab rates. Meanwhile, Losses from such intraday transactions can be set off only against speculative business profits.

For example, if you lost ₹10,000 in a gold or silver ETF intraday but made ₹15,000 profit in a stock or ETF intraday, you will pay tax only on the net ₹5,000. However, if ETF trades were delivery-based, it would be considered capital gains and thus cannot be set off against speculative losses.

—PRASHANT MAHESH

Section 301: How USTR polices trade partners

Sidhartha@timesofindia.com

After the setback on tariffs in the US Supreme Court, US president Donald Trump indicated that he would order section 301 investigations against trading partners. USTR Jamieson Greer followed it up, saying that the probe will cover major trading partners and may range from industrial policies of countries to drug pricing and ocean pollution.

What is Section 301?

Sections 301 to 310 of the Trade Act of 1974 of the United States, titled "Relief from Unfair Trade Practices" are collectively referred to as "Section 301". It provides for the Congress to grant the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) powers to investigate and initiate action through measures such as imposition of tariff to enforce US rights under trade agreements and respond to certain foreign trade practices. The law allows the USTR to "self-initiate" a probe or order investigations based on complaints.

How do these investigations work?

The investigations are conducted by a "Section 301 committee", which reviews petitions, conducts hearings and submits its recommendations. USTR is required to seek consultations with the foreign govt at the time of initiation of probe as part of trade agreements. For investigations that do not involve an agreement, USTR has generally requested consultations with other govts.

What happens after a probe and how much time does it take?

If USTR concludes there is a violation of a trade agreement or a country's action is "unjustifiable" and it "burdens or restricts" American commerce, action is "mandatory". In case it finds that the action by a govt is "unreasonable or discriminatory" and "burdens or restricts" US commerce, action is discretionary. Usually, in cases where trade agreements are not involved, USTR makes its determination within 12 months after the launch of a probe.

TOI Explains

What steps can USTR take?

It can impose tariffs or other import restrictions; withdraw or suspend trade agreement concessions; and enter into a binding agreement with a govt to either cease the action or compensate the US.

What kind of steps has the US taken in the past?

Since the WTO was set up in 1995 and until the first Trump Administration, the US used Section 301 primarily to build cases and pursue dispute settlement at the WTO. The first Trump administration used the provision to investigate foreign trade practices six times. Two investigations into China and the EU resulted in the imposition of tariffs. In 2020, USTR imposed tariffs on imports from the EU under Section 301 based on the findings of a WTO dispute settlement body on subsidies on civil aircraft. They were suspended in 2021.

In 2018, USTR imposed tariffs of up to 25% on US imports of $370 billion from China after a probe into the country's practices relating to "forced technology transfer", intellectual property rights, and innovation. During the Biden administration, after a review, the US increased tariffs on EVs. It also undertook three other investigations, involving Nicaragua's policies, and practices related to labour rights, human rights, and the rule of law and Chinese practices on semiconductor and ship building.

Under the current Trump administration, USTR has initiated two investigations into Brazil's practices related to digital trade and electronic payment services, ethanol market access, and other issues and also one related to China's implementation of its commitments under the US-China "Phase One" deal.

Govt reviews impact of US tariff shift

▸ Continued from page 1

After the US court's order, Malaysia and Indonesia, which had finalised agreements with the US over tariff, have emphasised that nothing has been notified.

South Korea, according to NY Times, has said that judicial disapproval of Trump's tariffs has nullified its 15% reciprocal tariff deal with the US. Significantly, while reacting to SCOTUS rebuff, Trump had on

TARIFF REVIEW

Friday said that the deal with India was on. Govt officials said the legal analysis of US actions is underway along with the possible impact on trade and strategic ties.

With an additional 15% tariff under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, all countries have now been put at the same level, at least for 150 days. Yet, Trump's statements indicate that countries will have to negotiate levies individually. USTR Jamieson Greer has indicated that the US President can also use Section 338 of the Tariff Act of 1930, which allows for up to 50% tariffs on countries that unreasonably discriminate against US trade through tariffs, regulations or other measures. These are issues that will be examined by Indian govt in addition to possible protection for pharma products in case action is taken under section 232 against the sector.

India leads in open-source surge: Microsoft's Asha Sharma

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Bengaluru: Asha Sharma, now elevated as CEO of Microsoft Gaming, told TOI ahead of Microsoft's flagship Ignite event in Nov last year—when she was president of product and development at CoreAI—that India was becoming increasingly central to Microsoft's AI ecosystem, particularly from a developer standpoint. "That creates an amazing flywheel—better open-source models, better tooling, and stronger ecosystem contributions," she said. "India was great both in open-source volume and contributions. It was wonderful to see India lead."

According to GitHub's State of the Octoverse Report 2025, India's developer ecosystem is expanding at an unprecedented pace. "We added more than 5 million developers in 2025—about 14% or 15% of all new GitHub developers worldwide were from India," Sharma said.

The country now has over 21.9 million developers building on GitHub, with 5.2 million joining in the past year alone—accounting for more than 14% of all new GitHub accounts globally. That translates to over 1 million new developers every quarter, the highest addition by any country in the world, marking a 31% year-on-year growth—the fastest annual growth rate ever recorded for India.

"Developers are now capable of doing much more. Their role is not just writing code—it's driving intent...When you look back at every platform shift, there were more jobs created, not fewer
Asha Sharma | CEO, MICROSOFT GAMING

India is now GitHub's largest source of new developers and its second-largest developer community, and is projected to become the world's largest within 5 years, with over 57.5 million developers by 2030. Sharma said companies in India are leveraging Azure AI and Microsoft Foundry, using pretrained models, ML Studio and GitHub Copilot within their own cloud environments to deliver low-latency, data-sovereign AI services.

She also said there was an explosion of foundation models pushing the efficient frontier, making them not only more capable but also more accessible as the cost per GPU became increasingly affordable. General-purpose technologies like AI, Sharma said, lower the floor so more people can become creators and makers—and raise the ceiling. "Developers are now capable of doing much more. Their role is not just writing code—it's driving intent," she said. "When you look back at every platform shift, there were more jobs created, not fewer." She added that economics and the way software is written are reshaping, requiring a new set of tools and capabilities to empower not only every developer, but every individual to be a maker.

SBI targets up to 10% green advances

New Delhi: State Bank of India (SBI) — the country's largest lender — has set a goal of increasing green advances to 7.5-10% by 2030, with 25% of these advances to be funded through green lines of credit.

The green advances portfolio stood at 1.6% of the bank's total advances as on March 31, 2025. Further strengthening this strategy, SBI has launched CHAKRA, a centre of excellence to finance sunrise sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility and green hydrogen, to accelerate India's green transition, the bank said in a statement on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the bank hosted the sixth edition of the SBI Green Marathon, reaffirming its commitment to environmental stewardship and responsible banking. The marathon drew over 10,000 participants in Mumbai across 5 km, 10 km and 21 km categories. AGENCIES

Hyderabad anchors Hexagon's AI ambitions

Akhil George & Shilpa Phadnis | TNN

New Delhi: Much of the software intelligence powering Swedish industrial tech firm Hexagon is being built in Hyderabad. The company's largest R&D centre is in the city, employing around 2,200 people — significantly more than in Switzerland, one of its traditional engineering strongholds. The firm clocked over $6 billion in revenue in fiscal 2025.

The Hyderabad teams develop the software backbone connecting Hexagon's hardware sensors to cloud platforms, processing vast volumes of geospatial and manufacturing data to deliver what CTO Burkhard Boeckem calls "a complete value chain". Engineers work across divisions — from geospatial mapping to manufacturing intelligence — with strong cross-pollination. Core technologies are adapted across industries, accelerating innovation. This convergence has even pushed Hexagon into medical aesthetics, where scanning systems originally built for terrain and buildings now analyse the human face.

For over two decades, Hexagon has built a bridge between the physical and digital worlds. Known for precision measurement tools — from laser scanners to airborne sensors — the company sees itself at the forefront of what Boeckem calls the "age of intelligence".

"Hexagon has been known for the last 20 years to take the physical world with all our measurement technology and transfer it into a digital twin," he told TOI on the sidelines of the India AI Summit in New Delhi. A digital twin is a highly accurate virtual replica of a real object, building or even an entire city. "Once the world is machine readable, that is the best base for artificial intelligence." Hexagon's tools scan cities from aircraft, map roads and buildings, and inspect factory components with microscopic precision. The company began embedding machine learning into products as early as 2012. When generative AI entered the mainstream, customers began asking: if the world is machine readable, can we query it?

"AI becomes truly powerful when it moves beyond the screen and into the real world...If a robot can sense, perceive and reason using accurate measurement data, it can act with precision. That bridge between digital intelligence and physical execution is what we call physical AI
Burkhard Boeckem | CTO, HEXAGON

That question has practical implications. A fully mapped city can be analysed by AI to classify surfaces and calculate how much roof space is available for solar panels. Several cities already use such insights to guide sustainability efforts.

Three years ago, Hexagon deepened its push into "physical AI" through a partnership with Nvidia. The ambition is not just to analyse the world but to act within it. "If a robot can sense its surroundings, perceive them and reason what it wants to do, we take it back into the real world. That's the essence of physical AI," Boeckem said.

In June last year, Hexagon unveiled a humanoid robot designed for industrial tasks — focused on inspection, handling and manipulation. At a launch event in Las Vegas, four robots autonomously scanned a car door with millimetre precision. Early adopters include automotive and aerospace manufacturers. Companies such as Tesla use Hexagon's inspection technologies in their plants.

The company's industrial footprint is vast. "About 90% of all smartphones in the world are touching Hexagon technology," Boeckem said. In car production, quality checks that once happened in separate inspection rooms now occur in real time. The goal is "lights-out manufacturing" — factories operating autonomously and making decisions when something goes wrong.

TIMES GLOBAL

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2026

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALL THE TIME TECHNOLOGY WAS SUPPOSED TO SAVE
— MARTY RUBIN

MARK RUFFALO SLAMS JAMES CAMERON'S NETFLIX-WARNER BROS. DEAL CRITIQUE: 'WHAT ABOUT PARAMOUNT MONOPOLY'

ALEXANDRA DADDARIO AND ANDREW FORM SPLIT AFTER 3 YEARS OF MARRIAGE, WILL 'CONTINUE TO CO-PARENT

Countries that made deals with US for lower tariffs left in lurch

After SC Decision, They Face Reality They May've Been Better Off Waiting

Alexandra Stevenson & River Akira Davis

It started as a week of trade wins for President Trump. On Tuesday, Japan committed $36 billion in investments in the US, and on Thursday, the president of Indonesia signed a deal in Washington to open up critical sectors of the country's economy to American companies. The moves were part of trade deals both countries had signed under the threat of massive tariffs, unlike anything they had faced in modern times — up to 35% in Japan's case and 32% for Indonesia. Trump hailed the developments as signs that the US was "WINNING again."

But by the end of the week, it was no longer clear who, if anyone, was winning. On Friday, the Supreme Court struck down the legal premise of Trump's punitive tariffs. After the ruling, he insisted that many of the deals would stand, although even he acknowledged that some might not. The court's decision has left the fate of the deals highly uncertain.

In Asia, where most of the world's goods are made, govts had raced to do deals with Trump. The goal was to negotiate lower tariffs for their export-dependent industries. Many govt leaders who brokered deals and made significant pledges faced political recrimination at home, accused of giving away too much and, at times, sacrificing sovereignty.

With damaging tariffs hanging over them, countries like Japan and Indonesia — not to mention South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Cambodia— made difficult concessions like lifting many of their tariffs on imports from the US. Some even promised to align with Washington sanctions, issues of national security and sourcing minerals, major undertakings that have irked constituencies at home as well as trading partners like China.

Now, after the court decision constraining Trump's trade cudgel, countries throughout Asia were left wondering if they had made a mistake in quickly finalising deals with Trump and whether existing agreements would stand. "Countries which signed deals with the US and agreed to a tariff above 15% are now disadvantaged," said Steven Okun, chief executive of APAC Advisers, a geopolitical consulting firm. "Do you renegotiate and drive a harder bargain since Trump's leverage is diminished? Or keep what you have to avoid retaliation?" he said.

In recent months, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan secured 15%percent tariffs in return for hundreds of billions of dollars in investments. For them, little has changed. Indonesia, Malaysia and Cambodia agreed to 19%percent tariffs.

Countries that chose to conclude deals with Washington, knowing that the Supreme Court could overturn the tariffs, assumed that President Trump would find another way to impose import duties.

"The winner countries are the ones that haven't actually negotiated a trade deal or, like Japan, committed a lot of money," said Paul Nadeau, a fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank. While Nadeau expects tariffs to persist in some form, he said that the decision could change the dynamic of future talks. "Trump may be more constrained in ways that change his leverage at the negotiating table," he said. NYT

Source: NYT

HOW THE NEW TARIFF COMPARES TO THE PREVIOUS RATE

New higher rate ■ Same rate ■ New lower rate

Map size by 2024 imports

Notes: Rates shown are a comparison between the emergency tariffs invalidated by the Supreme Court and the president's new 15% baseline. For Canada and Mexico, the tariffs do not apply to goods subject to a trade deal with the United States. Other tariffs, like sectoral Section 232 tariff and China-specific Section 301 tariffs, are not shown here. The new global tariff does not apply to all goods; some are exempt, and others are subject to certain other duties.

'Don't see countries pulling out of tariff deals'

US trade representative Jamieson Greer on Sunday said none of the countries that have reached trade deals with the US had shared plans to withdraw following a Supreme Court decision striking down tariffs. Greer said that he had already spoken with his counterpart from the European Union and would be speaking with officials from other countries. "I haven't heard anyone yet come to me and say the deal is off," Greer said in an interview. REUTERS

JPMorgan admits it closed Trump's accounts after the Jan 6 attack

New York: JPMorgan Chase acknowledged for the first time that it closed the bank accounts of President Donald Trump and several of his businesses in the political and legal aftermath of the Jan 6, 2021 attacks on the US Capitol, the latest development in a legal saga between the president and the nation's biggest bank over the issue known as "debanking."

The acknowledgment came in a court filing submitted this week in Trump's lawsuit against the bank and its leader, Jamie Dimon. The president sued for $5 billion, alleging that his accounts were closed for political reasons, disrupting his business operations. "In Feb 2021, JPMorgan informed Plaintiffs that certain accounts maintained with JPMorgan's CB and PB would be closed," JPMorgan's former chief administrative officer Dan Wilkening wrote in the court filing. The "PB" and "CB" stands for JPMorgan's private bank and commercial bank.

Until now, JPMorgan has never admitted it closed the president's accounts in writing. The bank would only speak hypothetically about when the bank closes accounts and its reasons for closing accounts, citing bank privacy laws. A spokeswoman for the bank declined to comment beyond what the bank said in its legal filings. AP

Pak claims to have killed at least 70 militants in strikes along Af border

Kabul Warns Of Consequences, Summons Pak Envoy

Kabul: Pakistan's military killed at least 70 militants in strikes along the border with Afghanistan early Sunday, targeting what it described as hideouts of Pakistani militants it blamed for recent attacks inside the country, the deputy interior minister said. Talal Chaudhry, Pakistan's deputy interior minister, told Geo News that at least 70 militants were killed in the strikes. He offered no evidence. Pakistan's state-run media later reported that militant casualties from the strikes jumped to 80.

The Afghan defence ministry said that "various civilian areas" in the provinces of Nangarhar and Paktika in eastern Afghanistan were hit, including a religious madrassa and multiple civilian homes. The statement called the strikes a violation of Afghanistan's airspace and sovereignty. Afghan govt spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid earlier on X said the attacks "killed and wounded dozens, including women and children." Mawlawi Fazl Rahman Fayyaz, the provincial director of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in Nangarhar province, said 18 people were killed.

A Taliban govt security source said that Pakistan's claim of killing at least 80 militants was false and imaginary.

AP

Locals stand next to a damaged car at the attack site in the Behsud district of Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, on Sunday

Afghanistan's ministry of foreign affairs summoned Pakistan's ambassador to Kabul and handed him a note of protest over the Pakistani strikes. In a statement, the ministry said protecting Afghanistan's territory is the Islamic Emirate's "Sharia responsibility" and warned that Pakistan would be responsible for the consequences of such attacks.

On Sunday, villagers were seen clearing rubble in Nangarhar following airstrikes, while mourners were preparing for funerals of those killed. Habib Ullah, a local tribal elder, said those killed in the strikes were not militants. "They were poor people who suffered greatly. Those killed were neither Taliban, nor military personnel, nor members of the former govt. They lived simple village lives," he told Associated Press.

Pakistan's information minister Attaullah Tarar wrote on X that the military conducted "intelligence-based, selective operations" against seven camps belonging to the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP, and its affiliates.

Hours before the Pakistani strikes, a suicide bomber targeted a security convoy in the border district of Bannu in Pakistan's northwest, killing two soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel. AGENCIES

'Deal is a deal, won't accept increase in tariffs': EU to US

Brussels: The European Commission demanded on Sunday that the US stick to the terms of an EU-US trade deal reached last year, after the US Supreme Court struck down Donald Trump's global tariffs and he responded with new levies across the board.

The Commission, which negotiates trade policy on behalf of the 27 EU member states, said Washington must provide "full clarity" on the steps it intends to take following the court ruling.

After the court struck down Trump's global tariffs on Friday, the US president announced temporary, across-the-board tariffs of 10%, which he then hiked to 15% a day later. "The current situation is not conducive to delivering 'fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial' transatlantic trade and investment, as agreed to by both sides" in the joint statement setting out the terms of last year's trade agreement, the Commission said. "A deal is a deal."

Last year's trade deal set a 15% US tariff rate for most EU goods, apart from those covered by other sectoral tariffs such as on steel. It also allowed zero tariffs on some products such as aircraft and spare parts. "EU products must continue to benefit from the most competitive treatment, with no increases in tariffs beyond the clear and all-inclusive ceiling previously agreed," the EU executive said. REUTERS

Convince Congress that tariffs are a good idea: Neal Katyal

▸Continued from P1

This earlier position, he argued, makes it difficult for the President to now invoke Section 122 for the current tariffs. This scrutiny arises in the aftermath of a landmark US Supreme Court ruling that struck down most of Trump's previous sweeping tariff measures. The court ruled 6-3 that the administration exceeded its authority by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 to impose import tariffs.

Following the ruling, Trump announced a new 10% global tariff on all countries under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, describing it as a temporary import surcharge (up to 15%) allowed for 150 days to address balance-of-payments deficits. He later raised it to the "fully allowed, and legally tested, 15% level," effective immediately.

Katyal said that if the President seeks sweeping tariffs, he should follow the constitutional process by seeking legislative nod from US Congress rather than relying on executive statutes. He argued that if the tariffs are a good idea, persuading Congress should not be difficult. The core legal dispute centres on whether trade deficits can be equated with balance-of-payments deficits to justify Section 122. Katyal's analysis underscores that these are conceptually distinct issues, aligning with DOJ's prior stance.

Iran: N-talks with Trump's envoy to resume this week

Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said he's likely to meet US special envoy Steve Witkoff Thursday in Geneva, seeking a diplomatic resolution for the latest stand-off over Tehran's nuclear programme.

"I believe that still, there is a good chance to have a diplomatic solution which is based on a win-win game and a solution is at our reach," Araghchi said Sunday on CBS' Face the Nation. "There is no need for any military build-up, and military buildup cannot help it, and cannot pressure us." Araghchi reiterated on Sunday that Iran is working on a proposal for an agreement that meets the needs of both parties. "I believe that when we meet... we can work on those elements and prepare a good text and come to a fast deal," he said. The White House is yet to comment. BLOOMBERG

University students hold new protests in Iran around memorials for those killed

Dubai: Students held protests which led to clashes at several Iranian universities for a second day on Sunday, according to local news agencies and social media posts, with Iran facing a US military build-up as it seeks to reach a nuclear deal with Washington. The fresh unrest follows anti-govt demonstrations last month in which thousands of people were killed in the worst domestic unrest since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran's state TV carried videos of what it said were individuals "pretending to be students" attacking pro-government students in Tehran who were taking part in protests to condemn Jan's disturbances, with these individuals allegedly injuring students by throwing rocks.

Protests also took place at universities in Mashhad in the northeast, according to videos published by the US-based rights group HRANA, which said the intervention of security forces in the protests led to injuries.

On Saturday a video purportedly showed rows of marchers at Sharif University of Technology condemning Iran's leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as a "murderous leader". The recent protests, which started in Dec were repressed in the most violent crackdown since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. REUTERS

Witkoff: Trump curious why Iran has not 'capitulated' amid US military build-up

US President Donald Trump is curious as to why Iran has not yet "capitulated" and agreed to curb its nuclear programme, as Washington builds up its military capability in the Middle East, Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said. "I don't want to use the word 'frustrated,' because he understands he has plenty of alternatives, but he's curious as to why they haven't.... I don't want to use the word 'capitulated,' but why they haven't capitulated," Witkoff said in an interview on Fox News on Saturday. "Why, under this pressure, with the amount of seapower and naval power over there, why haven't they come to us and said, 'We profess we don't want a weapon, so here's what we're prepared to do'? And yet it's sort of hard to get them to that place." REUTERS

Greenland, Denmark reject Trump's offer of hosp ship

Copenhagen: Denmark and its territory Greenland on Saturday rejected Donald Trump's offer to send a naval hospital ship to the Arctic island coveted by the US president. A day earlier, Trump said he was sending "a great hospital boat to Greenland to take care of the many people who are sick, and not being taken care of there". But Greenlandic PM Jens-Frederik Nielsen, who heads the autonomous territory's govt, wrote on his Facebook page: "That will be 'no thanks' from us." "President Trump's idea to send a US hospital ship here to Greenland has been duly noted. But we have a public health system where care is free for citizens," he said.

Danish defence minister Troels Lund Poulsen likewise told Danish broadcaster DR: "The Greenlandic population receives the healthcare it needs. They receive it either in Greenland, or, if they require specialised treatment, they receive it in Denmark."

On the day that Trump made his proposal, Danish forces evacuated a crew member of a US submarine off the coast of Greenland's capital Nuuk after the sailor requested urgent medical attention.

Trump, in his Truth Social message on Saturday about the hospital ship, posted an AI-generated image of a US navy medical vessel, USNS Mercy: "It's on the way!!!" he added. AFP

The Nuuk Hospital in Greenland

Mar-a-Lago breach: FBI takes over probe; motive unknown

▸Continued from P1

After entering near the north gate of the property, the man was confronted by two Secret Service agents and a Palm Beach County sheriff's deputy, according to Palm Beach county sheriff Ric Bradshaw.

"He was ordered to drop those two pieces of equipment that he had... At which time he put down the gas can, raised the shotgun to a shooting position," Bradshaw told reporters at a brief press conference. The two agents and the deputy "fired their weapons to neutralise the threat."

In a post on X, FBI director Kash Patel said the bureau would be "dedicating all necessary resources" to the investigation. Investigators are working to compile a psychological profile and a motive is still under investigation.

Bid to undermine Dhaka's cooperation with Beijing doomed to failure: China

Ahsan Tasnim

Dhaka: China on Sunday impressed on the new govt in Dhaka that it stands ready to carry forward cooperation in all sectors with Bangladesh and said "any attempts to undermine its cooperation with Bangladesh or any South Asian countries were doomed to failure".

The remarks came days after the US envoy in Bangladesh Brent Christensen said, "He is concerned about broader Chinese influence in South Asia" and President Donald Trump in a letter to PM Tarique Rahman stressed that the US-Bangladesh partnership "is based on mutual respect and a shared interest in fostering a free and open Indo-Pacific where strong, sovereign nations can prosper".

After his separate meetings with foreign minister Khalilur Rahman and state minister for foreign affairs Shama Obaed, Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen said Beijing appreciates Bangladesh in pursuing its "Bangladesh First" policy. China stands ready to carry forward cooperation in all sectors with the new govt of Bangladesh and jointly write new chapters in the bilateral relationship, he said. But, Yao said, "any attempt to undermine their cooperation with Bangladesh or any South Asian countries were doomed to failure". "Our cooperation is not targeting any third party, and should not be affected by any foreign force forces," he told reporters.

MESSAGE TO US?

The ambassador said Dhaka and Beijing have been engaged in long-standing discussions over the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project, expressing the hope that work on the long-awaited initiative will begin soon. He said the high-level visits between the two countries would continue.

Yao said as a friendly neighbour and a comprehensive strategic cooperative partner of Bangladesh, China attaches great importance to deepening relations with Bangladesh, and supports the new govt under the leadership of PM Tarique in exercising smooth governance.

Foreign minister Khalilur said China is a trust-worthy friend and reliable partner for Bangladesh. He said Bangladesh will continue to pursue a friendly policy towards China, enhance its friendship with China, and looks forward to further deepening practical cooperation with China for the greater benefit of both peoples.

DAILY PLANET

AFP

FAREWELL, WINTERS: People watch the burning of the 'Burning Heart' during celebrations of 'Maslenitsa' — an ancient farewell ceremony to winter — in the village of Nikola-Lenivets in Russia on Saturday

US reverses plan to halt TSA PreCheck

The Trump administration reversed course on Sunday on the programme that allows millions of airline travellers to get expedited security screening, saying it will remain operational, hours after it said the programme would be temporarily suspended amid a shutdown of much of the agency. The earlier homeland security department announcement that the programme was to be halted at 6am EST raised serious alarm amid travel groups and airlines as the busy spring break travel season starts in the US. More than 20 million people are enrolled in the TSA PreCheck programme that helps manage airport travel volumes.

UK protection officers guarded 2010 Epstein dinner party, say reports London police officers assigned to King Charles' younger brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor were instructed to provide security for a dinner party at Jeffrey Epstein's residence in New York in 2010, British media reported on Sunday. The Sunday Times, which first reported the story, cited emails from the Epstein files that appear to detail arrangements for Mountbatten-Windsor to stay with the late convicted sex offender in Dec 2010, along with his two protection officers from London's Metropolitan Police force. In an email sent the night before the event with the subject line "Security for party", a staff member informed Epstein the two officers had been given "instructions on the door".

Osaka gets anonymous gold bar gift worth $3.6m to fix aging water pipes: Osaka has received a hefty gift of gold bars worth 560 million yen ($3.6 million) from an anonymous donor asking for its specific use: to fix the Japanese city's dilapidated water pipes. The gold bars weighing 21kg in total were given to the Osaka City Waterworks Bureau in Nov by the donor who wants to help improve aging water pipes, Mayor Hideyuki Yokoyama told reporters Thursday. The mayor said his city will respect the donor's wishes and use the gift to improve waterworks projects. Concern over the safety of Osaka's waterworks systems grew after a massive sinkhole swallowed a truck and killed the driver last year.

A former taxi driver is at the centre of Russia's shadow war across Europe

Michael Schwirtz & Adam Goldman

The plots, say Western security officials, are part of a shadow war by Russia's intelligence services. An arson attack that destroyed more than 1,000 businesses outside Warsaw. Another that burned an IKEA in Lithuania. A plan to put incendiary devices on cargo planes in Britain, Germany and Poland. But a key figure in these plots, the officials say, is not an intelligence operative. He is a former taxi driver who lives in Russian farm country.

Aleksei Vladimirovich Kolosovsky, 42, who has ties to criminal groups involved in hacking, selling fake IDs and car theft, has made himself an essential player in this new form of unconventional conflict. With the help of Russian intelligence, he has overseen the execution of recent plots in Poland, Lithuania, Britain, Germany and perhaps elsewhere, according to court documents and interviews with more than a dozen security officials from five European nations.

Kolosovsky's role is a novel one, said the security officials. He is not a trained officer or an asset embedded in a foreign govt. He is more of a service provider, the officials said, working closely with intelligence officers — most of them from the GRU, Russia's military intelligence service, which has primary responsibility for sabotage operations. Operatives like Kolosovsky have become more common in the Kremlin's evolving and increasingly violent sabotage campaign.

A 2024 arson attack outside Warsaw was one of several plots carried out in Europe by a 'criminal network on behalf of Russian intelligence'

Kolosovsky, they said, brings to the fight an extensive network of criminals who know how to move goods and people without drawing the attention of law enforcement. Most important, these contacts reside and can travel in Europe, something that has become increasingly difficult for Russia's professional intelligence officers. "We are now operating in a space between peace and war," Blaise Metreweli, who leads Britain's spy agency, known as MI6, said in a speech. "Russia is testing us in the gray zone with tactics that are just below the threshold of war."

Kolosovsky first came to the attention of Western intelligence services after a pair of arson attacks in May 2024, two of the security officials said. Using an account on the messaging service Telegram, under variations of the name "Warrior," he recruited a web of agents, including a Ukrainian teenager, to plan attacks, according to the officials, as well as court records. In 2021, Mr Kolosovsky was briefly detained by the Russian authorities, though it is not clear why.

The services provided by Kolosovsky are a matter of necessity for Russia. Since the invasion of Ukraine, more than 750 Russian diplomats have been expelled from Europe, "the great majority of them spies," Ken McCallum, the head of the British domestic security agency MI5, said in 2024.

Nothing about Kolosovsky's public profile suggests a life of secret intrigue. He appears to live modestly. His last post on one account was in on Dec 15, 2020, his birthday. It featured a photo with his mother. NYT

"YOU SELDOM GET TOP TEAMS IN THE SAME ROUND. WE'VE GOT ZIMBABWE TOMORROW THEN TWO FINALISTS OF THE LAST WORLD CUP. IF YOU'RE GOING TO WIN, YOU'VE GOT TO PLAY WHAT'S IN FRONT OF YOU."
— Daren Sammy, WEST INDIES COACH

INDIA'S TACTICAL SURRENDER

SA Expose India's Frailties And Lack Of Plan B As Miller & Jansen Play Lead Role In 76-Run Win

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Ahmedabad: In a span of 11.4 overs of exquisite ball-striking, South Africa's David Miller almost laid bare India's plans with a match-defining knock of 63 off 35 balls. Four overs of incisive swing bowling from Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh at the start of the match was all India had going their way as the defending T20 champions fell face first in their first Super 8 encounter on Sunday. The 91,000 people at the Narendra Modi stadium spent much of the evening watching an abject surrender to a superiorly prepped South African team.

India plummeted to an embarrassing 76-run loss, while chasing South Africa's 187/7, after having reduced Aiden Markram's men to 20 for 3. Bumrah's spell of 3-15 was all the home crowd could cheer for. All of India's frailties and insecurities surfaced from the moment they decided to drop their designated vice-captain Axar Patel for Washington Sundar calling it a 'tactical' call.

South Africa had better plans and execution as Indian captain Suryakumar Yadav looked lost for ideas. With the net run-rate taking a beating, Surya will walk out with greater pressure in the next two matches against Zimbabwe and West Indies.

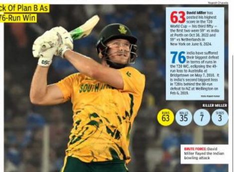
Everything India feared could go wrong, did. Abhishek Sharma's tumultuous tournament continued. Tilak Varma lasted just two balls and Surya failed to find rhythm as India's newest nemesis Marco Jansen (4/22) matched Bumrah's performance. The most telling outcome of the match was the missing Plan B if either of Bumrah and Varun Chakravarthy endured an off day.

South Africa have been here in Ahmedabad for a good 10 days. They spent the last two days practising drills to curb the hard-hitting and left-hander-heavy Indian batting lineup. Through the course of the chase, it appeared the South Africans were only replaying the drills, starting with Markram opening the bowling with his off-spin and dismissing India's only in-form batter Ishan Kishan in the first over. The unraveling of India's chase seemed too predictable as they struggled against quality pace of Jansen, Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi. The big-hitters Hardik Pandya and Rinku Singh fell to the skillful left-arm spin of Keshav Maharaj.

Earlier, India's new-ball bowlers had threatened to run away with the game inside the Powerplay. Then Miller happened. The first two crisp boundaries off mere punches through cover were indicative of his form. He played the perfect mentor to the exuberant Dewald Brevis as the duo plundered 97 runs in the next 8.2 overs before Brevis fell for 45 off 29 to Shivam Dube.

With every six Miller and Brevis chipped into the sea of blue in the stands, they were punching holes into the Indian bowling attack. Trump card Chakravarthy (1/47) was ripped apart with utter disdain.

Washington could bowl just two overs. Miller and Brevis feasted on Dube, taking 32 runs off his two overs. Falling back on Bumrah was the lone option left for Surya and he have just eight runs off his last two overs. But Tristan Stubbs hit Hardik for two sixes off the last two balls to finish the innings off in style.



63 David Miller has posted his highest score in the T20 World Cup — his third fifty — the first two were 59* vs India at Perth on Oct 30, 2022 and 59* vs Netherlands in New York on June 8, 2024.

76 India have suffered their biggest defeat in terms of runs in the T20 WC, eclipsing the 49-run loss to Australia at Bridgetown on May 7, 2010. It is India's second biggest loss in T20Is behind the 80-run defeat to NZ at Wellington on Feb 6, 2019.

KILLER MILLER

RUNS	BALLS	4S	SIXES
63	35	7	3

BRUTE FORCE: David Miller flayed the Indian bowling attack

33 Wickets at an average of 13.36 in 22 matches by Bumrah. He is the leading Indian wicket-taker in T20 World Cups, bettering the 32 at 14.84 in 18 matches by Arshdeep Singh.

SCOREBOARD

South Africa: Aiden Markram c Pandya b Arshdeep Singh 4, Quinton de Kock b Bumrah 6, Ryan Rickelton c Dube b Bumrah 7, Dewald Brevis c Abhishek Sharma b Dube 45, David Miller c Tilak Varma b Varun 63, Tristan Stubbs not out 44, Marco Jansen c Singh b Arshdeep Singh 2, Corbin Bosch c & b Bumrah 5, Kagiso Rabada not out 0
Extras: (b-1, lb-2, nb-2, w-6) 11
Total: 187/7 in 20 overs
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-12, 3-20, 4-117, 5-152, 6-158, 7-167
Bowling: Arshdeep Singh 4-0-28-2, Jasprit Bumrah 4-0-15-3, Varun Chakravarthy 4-0-47-1, Washington Sundar 2-0-17-0, Hardik Pandya 4-0-45-0, Shivam Dube 2-0-32-1.

India: Ishan Kishan c Rickleton b Markram 0, Abhishek Sharma c Bosch b Jansen 15, Tilak Varma c de Kock b Jansen 1, Suryakumar Yadav c Brevis b Bosch 18, Washington Sundar c de Kock b Bosch 11, Shivam Dube c Ngidi b Jansen 42, Hardik Pandya c Stubbs b Maharaj 18, Rinku Singh c Stubbs b Maharaj 0, Arshdeep Singh c Stubbs b Maharaj 1, Varun Chakravarthy not out 1, Jasprit Bumrah c Markram b Jansen 0.
Extras: (lb 1, w4): 5.
Total: 111 in 18.5 overs.
Fall-of-wickets: 1-0, 2-5, 3-26, 4-43, 5-51, 6-88, 7-88, 8-88, 9-111, 10-111.
Bowling: Aiden Markram 1-0-5-1, Marco Jansen 3.5-0-44-4, Kagiso Rabada 4-0-32-0, Lungi Ngidi 4-0-15-0, Keshav Maharaj 3-0-24-3, Corbin Bosch 3-0-12-2. **Result:** SA won by 76 runs.
Player-of-the-Match: David Miller.

TIME TO ASK APOLLO
MONDAY BLUES
Studies show that heart attack risk is ~20% higher on Mondays compared to other days.
Scan to know about your health
For any Health Query Chat with Ask Apollo

England scratchy but too good for prodigal Sri Lanka

Will Jacks' all-round show enabled him to clinch his third Player-of-the-Match award in the T20 WC. Shane Watson (four) holds the record in 2012

Vishal.Menon@timesofindia.com

Sri Lanka's wait for a breakthrough against England now stretched to their 12th consecutive T20I defeat as their batting unravelled in frustrating circumstances, falling well short in their Super Eight clash of the T20 World Cup at the Pallekele Cricket Stadium on Sunday.

After their bowlers laid the perfect foundation by restricting England to 146/9 on a dry, slow surface, Sri Lanka squandered the advantage with a reckless start, collapsing to 34/5 inside the Powerplay. From there, the chase meandered into oblivion, as they eventually folded up for 95, 51 runs short of the target.

The pitch demanded patience and clarity, and Sri Lanka's bowlers delivered on both these counts. Left-arm spinner Dunit Wellalage led the squeeze with 3/26, removing Jos Buttler and England captain Harry Brook in the pivotal middle overs that stalled England's momentum.

Maheesh Theekshana, with his offspinners and flickers, was equally incisive, conceding 21 runs and claiming two scalps, as seamers Dilshan Madushanaka and Dushmantha Chameera cleverly varied their pace to dent England any sustained acceleration.

Opener Phil Salt's 62 off 40 (6x4, 2x6) was a study in controlled aggression on a surface where clean hitting was arduous. He shepherded England to what proved to be a match-winning score.

In response, Sri Lanka's innings dismantled almost immediately. Jofra Archer struck twice with the new ball, removing in-form opener Pathum Nissanka (9) and Kamil Mishara (6).

The decisive burst, however, came from Will Jacks. Introduced in the Powerplay, his offspin perfectly suited this surface. Kusal Mendis chipped one back, Pavan Rathnayake fell in the very next delivery and Wellalage soon followed, as Sri Lanka crashed from 20/1 to 22/4.

From that point, the required rate spiralled. England's attack remained disciplined, changing the pace and forcing false shots from the Sri Lankan batters. Only their captain Dasun Shanaka 30 off 24 (1x4, 2x6) offered brief resistance.

Brief Scores: England: 146 for 9 in 20 overs (Phil Salt 62; Dunith Wellalage 3/26; Maheesh Theekshana 2/21, Dilshan Madushanka 2/25) bt **Sri Lanka 95 all out in 16.4 overs** (Will Jacks 3/22; Liam Dawson 2/27, Jofra Archer 2/20, Adil Rashid 2/13) by 51 runs.

12 England have won twelve successive games vs Sri Lanka in T20Is between March 26, 2016 and Feb 22, 2026. The tally is bettered only by Pakistan with 15 successive wins between Oct 12, 2008 and April 21, 2021 — the most in a row vs a full-member team.

95 Sri Lanka have recorded their lowest total vs England - their third lowest in T20 World Cup behind the 77 vs South Africa in New York on June 3, 2024

Raza, the superstar in Mission Zim-possible

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Mumbai: Zimbabwe captain **Sikandar Raza** led celebrations as his side sealed qualification for the Super Eights of the 2026 T20 World Cup after their match against Ireland was washed out, in front of a handful of fans at Pallekele.

The moment marked a contrast to Nov 2023 in Windhoek, Namibia, when a dejected Raza sat in the dressing room as Uganda celebrated a win over Zimbabwe during the African qualifiers. It was Zimbabwe's second loss in that competition, which eventually led to them missing out on the 2024 T20 World Cup berth.

Raza's smile has widened with each win in this edition. At 39, he is the fittest player in the squad and has led from the front while captaining, batting and bowling. His 26-ball 45 gave Zimbabwe the push they needed as they beat hosts Sri Lanka in the last match to top their group. With the ball, he took the new ball so that he did not overexpose his pacers or other spinners in the Powerplay.

Raza said he did not want to speak about his journey and focused instead on what the team achieved and how they grew in confidence with each win.

"I think that's what win does, it sort of lifts you, the confidence comes back and you start believing a lot more," said Raza, who sat second in the ICC T20 allrounder's list.

He added: "With every win it (confidence) has changed. In the first game I could see that there was confidence and belief but with every game that has got better. After the Ireland game when we qualified, I could see that the boys, as much as they were hungry, were relieved by the fact that we had qualified."

> "REGARDLESS OF HOW THE RESULT GOES, I DON'T THINK IT WILL BE BECAUSE WE COULDN'T ADJUST TO THE CONDITIONS."
> — Sikandar Raza, Zimbabwe captain

Others in the Zimbabwe camp praised Raza, who made his debut for the national team more than a decade back. Former opener Dion Ebrahim called him a "global superstar" after Zimbabwe's victory over Sri Lanka last week. "I think we're in the presence of brilliance. He's up there with the greats."

Raza has scored 2808 runs and has 103 wickets in 130 matches for Zimbabwe, with many performances coming in difficult situations. He also travelled across continents to play in franchise leagues, including the IPL, and said he wanted to pass on that knowledge to teammates who had limited franchise experience so they could tackle the shortest format more effectively, especially in major tournaments.

"Myself, Blessing (Muzarabani), Ryan (Burl), Richard (Ngarava) and all the other cricketers who have gone overseas for franchise cricket, we have always come back and spoken to the boys. We always try to share those experiences because if the boy hasn't got an experience, the least we can do is share the knowledge that we have gained when we have travelled overseas. So, I'm sure it has helped some of the boys, if not all," said Raza.

Zimbabwe played all their matches in Sri Lanka before travelling to India for their Super Eights fixtures, starting with Monday's clash against West Indies. Not many of their players played in India, but Raza said the team could adapt quickly. "Regardless of how the result goes, I don't think it will be because we couldn't adjust to conditions. If a team or an individual hasn't had that experience, rather than using that as an excuse."

West Indies' six-appeal meets Zimbabwean steel

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Mumbai: "The team is in a good space," a confident West Indies coach Daren Sammy said on the eve of their Super Eights Group 1 match against Zimbabwe at the Wankhede Stadium on Monday.

Sammy was in a happy mood on Sunday afternoon as his players trained in the nets for close to two-and-a-half hours. West Indies topped their group by winning all four matches, with different players contributing at key moments.

The Men-in-Maroon may have found the going tough in Tests and ODIs, but their calling is T20 cricket as their players are some of the hottest properties across major franchise leagues all over the world. They have won the T20 World Cup in 2012 and 2016. But their form has dipped in the last two editions as they have managed to win only two matches in 2022 and 2024. Their build-up to the World Cup also included series defeats to New Zealand, Nepal, Afghanistan and South Africa.

Back in India, where West Indies won their last title in 2016 with Sammy as captain, the team is in a happy space as their players are familiar with the conditions due to most of them playing in the IPL. The Windies have also shown the needed mental toughness to secure wins in a format where there is little to separate teams. The two-time champs have been content with the underdogs tag and have progressed smoothly through a tricky group in which every team has won at least one match.

Their secret sauce has been different players putting in match-winning performances during the group stage. Shimron Hetmyer (64, 36b) and Romario Shepherd (5/20) helped them beat Scotland. Shepherd, who missed the last two games due to injury, was available for the Zimbabwe match. Sherfane Rutherford (76*, 42b) and a collective bowling effort led by Gudakesh Motie (3/33) helped them defeat England. Jason Holder (4/27) and Shai Hope (61*, 44b) starred in a win over Nepal, before Hope (74, 46b) and Shamar Joseph (4/30) helped them beat Italy.

Zimbabwe also enter the Super Eights in strong form after topping their group, including wins over Australia and Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka. They missed qualification for the last edition but have arrived in India with confidence.

Zimbabwe, along with the showing of the emerging nations, have been the flavour of the tournament with the neutrals warming up to their exploits. Led by inspirational captain Sikandar Raza, they have found matchwinners like the young Brian Bennett, who is yet to be dismissed in the tournament and played crucial innings in the wins over Australia and Sri Lanka. Zimbabwe's bowling has been a key strength too, with Blessing Muzarabani leading with nine wickets so far, supported by Graeme Cremer and Brad Evans.

West Indies and Zimbabwe last played against each other in the 2022 edition in Australia, with West Indies winning by 31 runs. Zimbabwe's challenge though will be adapting quickly to conditions at the Wankhede, which has offered assistance to the bowlers.

FACE-OFF

WI vs ZIM

TV TIME: 7 PM | STAR SPORTS | JIOHOTSTAR

HEAD TO HEAD

WI	ZIM
3	1

LAST FIVE MATCHES

WI	W	W	W	W	W
ZIM	W	NR	W	L	L

VENUE: MUMBAI

WEATHER 27°C

ODDS

WI	ZIM
5/10	6/4

Player availability fuels WI coach Sammy's WC ambitions

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Mumbai: West Indies coach Daren Sammy said his team believed they could do "something special" as they prepared to begin their Super Eights Group 1 campaign against Zimbabwe at the Wankhede Stadium on Monday.

Sammy said the West Indies drew confidence from four straight wins in the 2026 T20 World Cup, and added that the availability of players, long a point of debate in West Indies cricket, helped the side's preparation and gave players role clarity.

"It's the first time in a long time that we've had every single person that is available for the West Indies playing. Each player has put in a conscious effort to pay a little bit more attention to the detail, the preparation, the planning. With the clarity that they've had (of their roles), it makes it easier to execute. The guys believe they could do something special," said Sammy.

Wearing a fresh haircut which pacer Shamar Joseph gave him at Sunday's press conference, Sammy said he was happy with recent outcomes.

While the West Indies have been flying high, after disappointing in the last two editions, the 42-year-old isn't taking Zimbabwe lightly and responded sharply when asked about the African nation's unexpected qualification for the Super Eights. "Who said Zimbabwe are not supposed to be here?" he shot back.

As if for effect, he then added, "A lot of people said the West Indies are not supposed to be here either."

Mumbai take first innings lead

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ayush Jethwa stole the limelight with an unbeaten century as Mumbai dominated the proceedings against Karnataka on the second day of the quarterfinal match of the Col CK Nayudu Trophy U-23 in Mumbai on Sunday.

CK NAYUDU TROPHY

Resuming at 12 for no loss, overnight batters Ayush and Angkrish Raghuvanshi set the tone as Mumbai reached 310/1 at stumps. Having bowled out Karnataka for 240 on the opening day, the hosts now hold a 70-run lead. Skipper Angkrish and Ayush frustrated the Karnataka bowlers as the duo stitched together an opening stand of 200 off 385 deliveries.

The pair scored in tandem before Karthikeya KP handed Karnataka the breakthrough in the 64th over. Angkrish was denied a century as the Mumbai captain departed after a solid 92 off 177 deliveries. His knock included eleven boundaries and one six.

However, it was a momentary pause in Mumbai's onslaught as Manan Bhatt joined forces with Ayush to keep the scoreboard ticking. The pair added an unbroken third-wicket partnership of 110 off 200 deliveries to help the hosts take the first innings lead.

Ayush batted through the day to remain unbeaten on 139 off 316 deliveries. His gritty knock was laced with eighteen hits to the fence and one over it. On the other hand, Manan, who brought his half-century up before stumps were drawn, remained unbeaten on 64 off 92 deliveries.

Brief scores: Karnataka: 240 vs **Mumbai** (o/n 12 for no loss): 310/1 in 97 overs (Ayush Jethwa 139 batting, Manan Bhatt 64 batting)

MSD may not play all games

Ahmedabad: The question around MS Dhoni's future resurfaced again as the IPL caravan readies for the 2026 season - will the former skipper feature in all matches for CSK this year? Dhoni, who will turn 45 later this year, will be available for CSK for the upcoming IPL season, a top franchise source confirmed. However, with CSK's prize transfer Sanju Samson now in the ranks, it is unlikely that the legendary former India captain would play all the league games.

"We can confirm this much that he is coming to Chennai and had confirmed his availability for the season," a top CSK source told PTI on condition of anonymity. "Whether he will play all games or not is something we can't say at the moment," the source added.

Tejal, Prema power India A to title

Bangkok: Tejal Hasanbis made an impactful 51 not out off 34 balls on a slow turner before leg-spinner Prema Rawat made the ball talk as India 'A' outplayed Bangladesh 'A' by 46 runs in a low-scoring final to defend the ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars here on Sunday.

TEJAL HASANBIS

At 44 for four, India were in trouble but Hasanbis, who has played ODIs for India, and captain Radha Yadav, another international, (36 off 30) shared an 89-run stand for the fifth wicket to lift their team to 134 for seven in 20 overs.

Considering the conditions and strength of the Indian bowling attack, the Radha-led side comfortably defended the total by bowling out Bangladesh for 88 in 19.1 overs.

The star with the ball was Prema (3/12 in four overs), who was part of RCB's triumphant campaign in the recently played WPL. She gave the ball plenty of flight and got enough purchase off the surface.

Bangladesh were never in the run chase having lost their first wicket for 12 runs in the third over. The procession started when Ishma Tanjim was caught off pacer Saima Thakor after unsuccessfully charging down the pitch. Prema got her wicket with a classical leg-break that bounced a tad extra to take the outside edge of Shamima Sultana. Even in the inaugural final of the tournament in 2023, India 'A' got the better of Bangladesh 'A'.

Batting first, India 'A' felt the pressure on a tricky surface but Hasanbis showed plenty of skill and character to bail her team out of trouble. She batted at a strike rate of 150, much higher than the rest of the batters in the game, to make a decisive difference.

While the top four hardly contributed for India 'A', Hasanbis was able to clear the ropes twice with Radha providing the much needed support at the end.

Brief scores: India 'A': 134/7 in 20 overs (Tejal Hasanbis 51n.o, Radha Yadav 36; Fahima Khatun 4-25) bt Bangladesh: 88 all out in 19.1 overs (Sonia Mendhiya 2-21, Tanuja Kanwar 2-11, Prema Rawat 3-12). PTI

SNAP SHOTS

Four athletes get reduced bans

Four Indian athletes have received reduced bans from the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) after early admission of their offence and acceptance of the sanction. Himanshu Rathi, Basanti Kumari and Shashi Bhushan Singh were handed three-year bans — a reduction of one year — after they accepted their offence within 20 days of being charged, according to the NADA's latest update. Meanwhile, Balvindra Singh was handed a five-year ban, starting from Sept 19, 2025.

Sahil clinches gold: Punjab athlete Sahil upset his more fancied rivals to clinch the gold in the men's half marathon on the final day of the Indian Open Race Walk Competition in Chandigarh on Sunday. At the Sukhna Lake course, the Sahil had enough in the tank to hold off the challenge of experienced Servin Sebastian (1:25:50) of Tamil Nadu over the 21km distance and emerge winner with a time of 1 hour 25 minute 48 seconds. **Results: Men 21km:** 1. Sahil (Pun, 1:25:48), 2. Servin Sebastian (TN, 1:25:50), 3. Kuldeep (Har, 1:26:03). **Women: 21km:** 1. Ravina (Har, 1:39:25), 2. Munita Prajapati (UP, 1:39:26), 3. Mansi Negi (Utt, 1:42:58).

ICC meetings in March: Doha will host the next round of International Cricket Council board and committee meetings from Mar 25-27, reflecting the world body's growing engagement with the sport in the middle eastern nation.

Suns prevail: Phoenix Suns clinched a 113-110 double-overtime victory over the Orlando Magic.

Margaretta wins plum: Pesi Shroff-trained Margaretta, ridden by G Vivek, won the Poonawalla Breeders' Multi-Million, the feature event of the races in Mumbai on Sunday.

THE RAHUL FACTOR

The Senior Pro Has Been A Guiding Hand To Karnataka's Young Guns In The Run-Up To The Final

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GEARING UP: (From left) Karnataka stars Devdutt Padikkal, Mayank Agarwal and KL Rahul

Bengaluru: A month ago, an SOS call from a Karnataka teammate prompted KL Rahul to join the former champions for their final Ranji Trophy league engagement against Punjab. Initially expected to link up only for the knockouts, Rahul advanced his return after a heavy home defeat to Madhya Pradesh left Karnataka with one foot near the exit door heading into the must-win clash in Mohali. In three matches, Rahul has piled up 457 runs, including two centuries and two half-centuries, at an average of 91.40. But his contribution has extended far beyond the weight of runs.

In a dressing room that includes five Test players, Rahul is the most experienced. His calm authority, clarity of thought and willingness to engage with younger teammates have added a different dimension to Karnataka's campaign.

Head coach Yere Goud underlined the senior batter's impact in the dressing room. "Rahul has made a huge im-

RANJI TROPHY

pact. We have young players like R Smaran and KV Aneesh, and he talks to them about handling certain situations. So him being there has given (them) confidence," Goud said.

Consistency has indeed been Rahul's hallmark. As Karnataka head into the Ranji Trophy final against Jammu and Kashmir in Hubballi starting on Tuesday, they will not forget that Rahul struck centuries in the previous two title clashes the state has won.

Beyond the numbers and milestones, it is the everyday conversations that have left a mark. Many grew up watching Rahul rise through the ranks — from a prolific age-group batter to an all-format international.

Earlier this season, when he featured in a couple of Vijay Hazare Trophy fixtures, it was a surreal experience for the youngsters. Wicketkeeper-batter Kruthik Krishna is among those soaking in the experience.

"There's so much to learn from him. He has done everything possible as a batter, opening, batting at No 4 or No 7,

> To come back and play for your first-class team, which has had a huge impact on who we are as players, and to share the dressing room with players you've grown up with and the young talent coming through, it feels special. I always try to do the best I can for the team — **KL Rahul**

and he is also a keeper. So having him is a boost. I can learn how to plan and shape my innings, and that's irrespective of the performance. That simplifies your game a lot rather than you thinking about the pitch, the opposition and all of that. I've had a lot of conversations with him," Kruthik said.

For a young cricketer, exposure to Rahul's preparation methods and mental approach has proven invaluable. It is not just about technique but about temperament — understanding phases of a game, reading match situations and responding rather than reacting. Among those learning on the go is the season's top run-getter, R Smaran, who has amassed 950 runs so far. The left-hander believes Rahul's guidance stretches across formats. "We've had a lot of conversations about how you can go about the game, not only in the Ranji Trophy but also in the shorter formats. We were really glad that we had him in the team for couple of matches during the Vijay Hazare as well," Smaran said, adding with a smile, "Till the time we have him in the Karnataka dressing room, I would like to keep picking his brains."

Smaran also highlighted what sets the senior apart. "He's the kind of guy who prioritises the state whenever he's playing for us. He has a lot of inputs to give to the youngsters, be it a bowler, 'keeper or batter. He always shares his knowledge and experiences ahead of the game. He also adds a lot of value whether we're batting or fielding in the slips."

Smaran also acknowledged the value the other four Test players – Karun Nair, Mayank Agarwal, Prasidh Krishna and skipper Devdutt Padikkal bring to the team.

'To beat Novak in the RG final was really special'

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Getty Images

Dubai: Stan Wawrinka returns to a place of cherished memories this week, back at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis where he lifted the trophy in 2016. Now 40 and competing in the final season of a storied career that once saw him rise to a career-high No. 3 in the world, the Swiss great is embracing one last chapter on the Tour. *Excerpts:*

Stanimal captured the physical power of your game, do you think the mental strength behind your success was sometimes overlooked?

That's the beauty of tennis, it has many parts to it. It's a big puzzle. You need to put every piece of the puzzle in its place – fitness, tennis, mentally, and also you need to be in the right place. It took a lot of hard work, a lot of energy to push and find myself as a player. It was important for me to work on myself, my mindset, and how I was going to go in with confidence, ready to beat the best players in the world. It took me years to achieve that. I'm really happy with what I've done.

Was it tougher to break through in the Federer-Nadal-Djokovic era than it is today in the Alcaraz-Sinner duopoly?

Those five players you mentioned, and also Andy Murray are the best players we saw in the game. It has been amazing for me to face them, to be able to play against the Big Four for more than 15 years. It was a challenge. But first I'm a fan of tennis, I'm passionate about the game. I always enjoyed watching them, as a tennis fan and player. It was an opportunity for me to play the best players in the game. Right now we are seeing that the level of Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz has been amazingly high. What they've been doing already for a few years, winning all the Grand Slams between them, is amazing to watch.

STAN'S SLAM HIGHS

Australian Open (2014) bt Rafael Nadal 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3
French Open (2015) bt Novak Djokovic 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4
US Open (2016) bt Novak Djokovic 6-7 (1), 6-4, 7-5, 6-3

Which of your three Grand Slam titles gave you the most satisfaction?

It's tough to choose, but it's also my job to answer the question. If I have to pick one title... (exhales) they have all been really special, but one is the French Open (2015). I grew up playing on clay, I practised a lot in Spain, also coming from the French part of Switzerland, Roland Garros was the one that we watched the most as kids. That's also the one I won as a junior (2003). To beat Novak in the final there was really special.

Was retirement a sudden decision, or something that had been building in the months before your announcement?

The last few years, I've been asking myself when to stop but I never had an answer. At the end of last year, I finally had the answer. I realised that I was most at peace to play for one more year, to push one last time. I'm still passionate about the game, I wish I could play forever; but nobody can play forever. I also wanted to finish my 20-plus year career on a good note. So I'm happy that my level is still there and physically I'm feeling good.

You appear leaner now than at your peak?

I always try to push myself to be the best player I can to be. You have to do that to be able to stay in the game for 20 years. It was challenging, fitness wise, especially with the injuries. I have always been trying to optimise, to do what's best for me, what's best for my body so that I could push my own limits.

You were known for those statement shorts and now, in your final year, you're making a statement with this 40-Love tee...

Last year I turned 40, so Yonex did this for me as a present. The 'Love' stands for my love of the game, my passion.

Alcaraz storms to Qatar Open title

Carlos Alcaraz was at his devastating best on Saturday as he claimed the Qatar Open title with a ruthless 6-2, 6-1 win over Arthur Fils. The seven-time Grand Slam champion needed just over 50 minutes to see off his French opponent and claim the 20th title of his career. Following Australian Open success earlier this month, Alcaraz extended his match-winning streak to 12.

Korda to face Paul

Sebastian Korda reached his first ATP final in more than a year, topping third-seeded Italian Flavio Cobolli 7-6 (7/1), 6-1 to book a title showdown with Tommy Paul in Delray Beach, Florida. Paul beat Learner Tien 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. AFP

NorthEast dampen BFC's home party

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SLICE OF ACTION: BFC's Braian Emmanuel Sanchez (C) in action

Bengaluru: Former champions Bengaluru FC's plan to score their second straight win in front of their adoring fans were spoiled by an enterprising NorthEast United FC, who rallied superbly to force a 1-1 draw in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

BFC's coach Renedy Singh knew about the dangers posed by the visitors when he talked on match eve about the 2-2 draw when the two teams last met at the Sree Kanteerava stadium. It was another deadlock, in front of 13,021 fans, as sub-

ISL

stitute Lalrinzuala came up with a superb goal in the 68th minute to cancel out Brian Sanchez's opener that put BFC ahead in the 20th minute.

It was a big game for NEFUC, after losing to East Bengal in their opener, and the boys responded to the big challenge away from home. They began with gusto, pressing the hosts till they fell behind and in the second half engineered a superb comeback plotted by coach Juan Ali Hammou. The highlanders superb show was the result of a few standout performers, including defender Asheer Akhtar. The Nagpur player troubled BFC in both halves. Just after the hour mark, he came up with a fine header, but Gurpreet Singh Sandhu expertly tipped it away.

The Highlanders grew in confidence and in the very next minute, Spanish medio Jairo Bustara only had Sandhu to beat after being put through by local boy Macarton Louis Nickson, but Sandhu smothered the effort with ease. Then came Akhtar's brilliance, who found Lalrinzuala with a long ball. The youngster moved into the box, beating the defence with great pace and fired in a first-time shot that hit the post and went in. Sandhu, who saved BFC till then, couldn't do much against the rasping volley.

BFC began without the dependable Rahul Bheke, who was not even on the bench. The Mumbai star's absence was felt as BFC failed to capitalize on set pieces and left gaps in their own area. Sunil Chhetri came on in the second half, but even he couldn't do much after being shadowed by Akhtar and Co. The hosts went tantalisingly close to snatching a second win, but Ryan Williams hit the post from close in the 80th minute.

Earlier, BFC took the lead against the run of play as the visitors pressed hard to take the lead. NEUFC came hard at the Blues straight from kick-off. A combined thrust saw Parthib Gogoi on target, but skipper Gurpreet blocked the close-range attempt. By the 12th minute, NEUFC forced two corner kicks but wasted both at the far post.

With the fans enjoying the action on Sunday evening, came the opener. Latching on to a pass near the centre circle, BFC medio Braian Emmanuel Sanchez drove in through the middle. Before the NEUFC defenders moved in to contain the threat, the Argentine unleashed a powerful right footer that caught goalkeeper Gurmeet napping. The ball was drilled into the right side of the keeper even before he could react.

At the other end, it was Sandhu who emerged as the biggest wall for the visitors to scale till the 68th minute.

Result: Bengaluru FC 1 (Sanchez 20) drew with NorthEast United 1 (Lalrinzuala 68)

Vaishnavi's quiet grit & loud statement

Indian Wildcard Falls Short In Final, But Takes Home Belief & Experience

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STRONG RUN: Vaishnavi Adkar in action in Bengaluru on Sunday

Bengaluru: Off the court, Vaishnavi Adkar is an introvert. On it, she lets her racquet speak — usually from the baseline. Even when points slip away, the 21-year-old betrays little emotion, offering herself the occasional wry comment before resetting for the next rally.

That understated resilience defined her remarka-

TENNIS

ble run at the ITF Women's W100 event at the SM Krishna Tennis Stadium this week. Though the wildcard entrant was outplayed 0-6, 1-6 in a 56-minute final by Belgium's third seed Hanne Vandewinkel (124), Vaishnavi left with more than a runner-up trophy — belief.

Currently ranked 690 on the WTA Tour, Vaishnavi exceeded expectations by storming into the W100 final. Along the way, she toppled higher-ranked opponents in succession: Thailand's Lanlana Tararudee (126), Australia's Taylah Preston (148) and Japan's Mai Hontama (220). The wins are likely to propel her into the top 500 for the first time.

"This was a solid week for me here," said Vaishnavi, who shifted base to the city two months ago, and trains at the Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy. Her satisfaction stems from context. Last season was disrupted by injuries including a hairline fracture in her shin and an abdominal strain.

"After the year I had, I learned a lot from this event. A week like this is going to be very helpful. I already feel much better about my game. It has strengthened my self-belief and confidence."

In Sunday's final, even a fit and in-form Vaishnavi could not stop Vandewinkel, who fired five aces, including three in a row, to wrap up the first set in just 20 minutes. Vaishnavi showed glimpses of her strong baseline game, but managed to get on the scoreboard only in the ninth game, a testament to Vandewinkel's control.

However, she did not drop her head. Vaishnavi continued to go for her shots, but unforced errors ultimately led to her downfall against the confident Belgian, who claimed her second straight title in India. Vandewinkel, who won the W75 event in Pune last week, collected 100 WTA points, while the home player had to settle for 65.

With renewed confidence, Vaishnavi — who idolises Novak Djokovic — will next compete at the W35 event in Kalaburagi. "I have improved a lot compared to four months ago. But going forward, I need to improve every aspect of my game and just keep working on it," she added. If this week in Bengaluru is any indication, the player from Pune is ready to let her racquet continue doing the talking, louder than ever.

Karkera, Nirmaben clinch top honours

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ECSTATIC: Kartik Karkera

New Delhi: The capital woke up to a spectacle of stamina and speed as over 30,000 runners took to the streets for the Cognizant New Delhi Marathon, a race that doubled up as a crucial qualifier for the Asian Games later this year.

Mumbai's Kartik Karkera stamped his authority in the men's elite category,

MARATHON

clocking a superb 2:13:10 over the full marathon distance to comfortably breach the Asian Games qualifying mark of 2:15:04. In a gripping finish, Karkera held off strong challenges from Gopi Thonakal (2:13:12) and Man Singh (2:13:15).

The 28-year-old credited discipline and preparation for his success. "You have to stay patient. It's about consistency," said Karkera.

In the women's race, Thakor Nirmaben (2:41:15) produced a composed run to finish ahead of Bhagirathi (2:43:28) and Ashwini Jadhav (2:56:59). Also coached by Singh, Nirmaben said the flatter Delhi route worked to her advantage compared to her training base in Nashik. However, none of them attained the Asian Games cut off mark.

The half-marathon titles went to Kuldip Kumar (1:08:51) and Genet Shikur Reshid (1:19:36).

Barcelona return to La Liga summit

TUSSLE: Barcelona's Gerard Martin (top) heads the ball during their match against Levante at the Camp Nou Stadium

Barcelona cruised to a 3-0 victory over Levante to reclaim pole position in La Liga on Sunday. After Real Madrid fell to a 2-1 defeat at Osasuna on Saturday, Hansi Flick's side moved a point clear of their bitter rivals with a comfortable victory at Camp Nou against the team in 19th.

Marc Bernal and Frenkie de Jong gave Barca a commanding first-half lead and Fermin Lopez wrapped up the win with a sensational drive late on. Barcelona were glad to get back to win-

FOOTBALL

ning ways after a 4-0 thrashing by Atletico Madrid in the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg last week and then a 2-1 defeat by Girona on Monday in La Liga.

It was Bernal's second goal since returning from a long-term knee injury, which kept the 18-year-old out of action for over a year. Despite Flick's calls for improvement in defence, Barca were as open as ever, although Levante's poor finishing meant they could not capitalise. Bernal sent Barca ahead after good work by Joao Cancelo, who impressed on a rare start after his arrival on loan in January, and Eric Garcia.

Veteran Polish forward Robert Lewandowski could have doubled Barca's advantage but fired into the ground and over the bar when well placed. Cancelo hit the post with a cross aimed at Lewandowski, before the Portuguese defender curved out the second for De Jong with a similar ball in from the left. De Jong delivered the finishing touch to give Barca a two-goal lead at the break. Substitute Lopez got a spectacular third, rattling home a long-range effort in off the post.

LIVERPOOL SNATCH LATE VICTORY

Liverpool midfielder Alexis Mac Allister struck a winner deep into stoppage-time as his side snatched a scarcely-deserved 1-0 win at Nottingham Forest in the Premier League on Sunday. After a pedestrian 90 minutes in which they barely managed a shot on target, Mac Allister lit the fuse with a stoppage-time effort that was ruled out for handball before rifling home a rebound in the 97th minute to snatch the win.

On Saturday, Manchester City piled pressure on leaders Arsenal as Nico O'Reilly's brace clinched a crucial 2-1 win against Newcastle.

ATALANTA WIN

Atalanta's Lazar Samardzic scored a late winner as they fought back to beat third-placed visitors Napoli 2-1 on Sunday, extending their unbeaten Serie A run to nine games.

Results: Spanish league: Getafe 0 lost to Sevilla 1 (Sow 64); Barcelona 3 (Bernal 4, De Jong 32, Lopez 80) bt Levante 0. **EPL:** Nottingham Forest 0 lost to Liverpool 1 (Mac Allister 90+7); Crystal Palace 1 (Guessand 90) bt Wolves 0; Sunderland 1 (Le Fee 76-pen) lost to Fulham 3 (Jimenez 54, 61-pen, Iwobi 89). **On Saturday:** Manchester City 2 (O'Reilly 16, 27) bt Newcastle 1 (Hall 22). **Italian league:** Genoa 3 (Norton-Cuffy 22, Ekuban 40, Messias 83) bt Torino 0; Atalanta 2 (Pasalic 61, Samardzic 83) bt Napoli 1 (Beukema 33). **German league:** Freiburg 2 ([illegible] 38, Matanovic 70) bt Borussia Moenchengladbach 1 (Tabakovic 85). AGENCIES

India earn first point of Pro League

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Hockey India/X
ON TARGET: Amit Rohidas

The Indian men's hockey team finally won their first point of this edition of Pro League as they earned a 2-2 draw against Australia in regulation time before the hosts grabbed the bonus point via a 5-4 win in the penalty shoot-out at Tasmania Hockey Centre in Hobart on Sunday.

After five consecutive losses, it was for the first time that the Indian team impressed this year, and at one

HOCKEY

point it looked certain they would grab their maiden win of the season after Amit Rohidas (15th) and Jugraj Singh (43rd) put them 2-0 ahead.

But Australia, as expected, pulled things back in the final fifteen minutes after they won 12 penalty corners. India did their best to defend the set pieces, but Joel Rintala (47th, 58th) converted two of them to help the Aussies draw level.

They could have added more if not for some brilliant goalkeeping by Mohith HS. On one occasion, he pulled off a double save that took everyone's breath away. He first stopped the PC from Rintala on the left post before diving towards the right post to save Tim Brand's shot from point-blank range.

He couldn't, however, continue his heroics in the penalty shoot-outs as the Aussies scored all their goals while Aditya Arjun Lalage missed India's fifth shot with Jed Snowden getting a touch to it.

India will now get a break on Monday before they play Spain for the second time in the third match of the mini tournament on Tuesday.

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Hansi Flick's Barcelona cruise to a 3-0 victory over Levante to reclaim pole position in La Liga, P 16

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